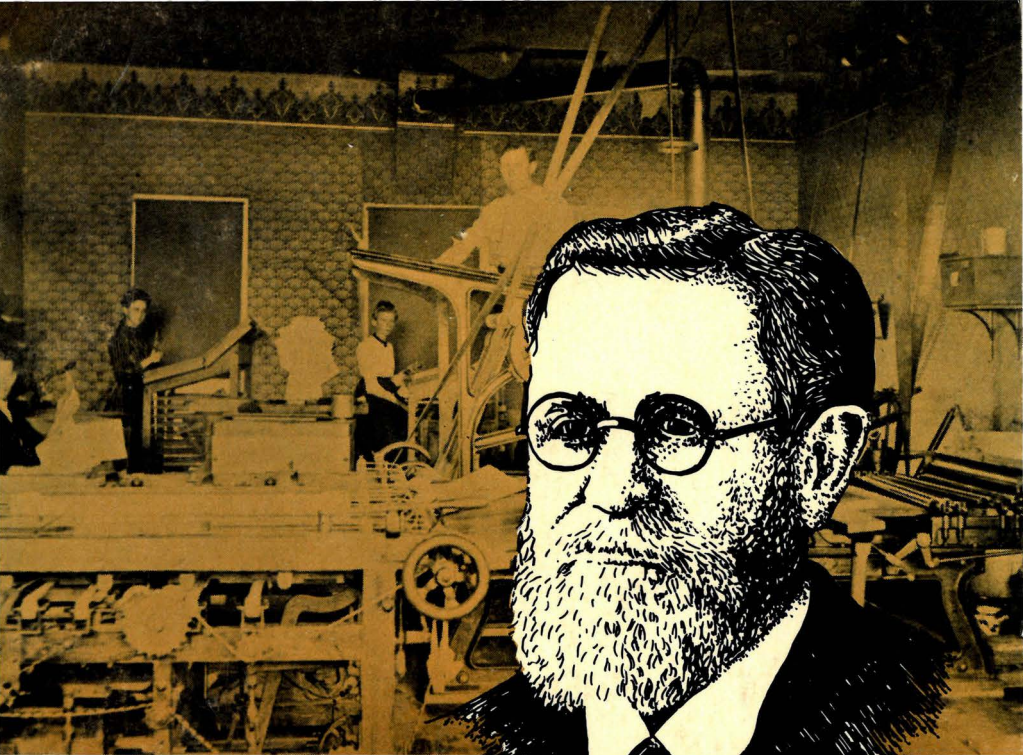




Pioneer Publisher: The Life and Times of J. F. Harms

by Orlando Harms

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PIONEER PUBLISHER: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF J. F.
HARMS

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*To the physical and spiritual pioneers
who in multitudinal ways
paid the price
of the benefits we now enjoy*

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Foreword

The footprints of a great man are soon worn away unless someone else walks the same road and shares with other travelers what he has learned. One of the best road maps for people in pilgrimage is a biography — the recorded witness of a real human being who in living faith has blazed new trails and thereby encourages others in their journey of faith. To record such a story the historian-biographer must walk the road of his subject through the times of his subject. Orlando Harms has indeed done that, and has created an authentic memorial in this historical account.

Pioneer Publisher: The Life and Times of J.F. Harms should have been published thirty-five years sooner. The footprints of this pioneer leader have almost been erased. Many young people know nothing about this inspirational churchman. Thanks to Orlando Harms, a distant relative, and the supportive encouragement of the Board of Christian Literature and the Tabor College Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, we have recovered what was almost lost and forgotten. A living memorial has been established — a witness which will help other believers in pilgrimage.

This well-documented biography will keep alive the courageous and creative Christian witness of a Mennonite Brethren pioneer in North America who:

- Served as dean of Mennonite Brethren publishers for nearly half a century;
- Served as minister and evangelist during the early years of the Mennonite Brethren Conference;
- Helped establish two Mennonite Brethren educational institutions;
- Promoted both home and foreign missions;

- Served as administrator of food distribution for the hungry in South Russia after World War 1.

Orlando Harms knew his mentor well. There was a father-son relationship between the two. John once said to Orlando, "You are really more like my son than my own sons. You have been a teacher, a minister, and editor." He apparently saw in Orlando an extension of his own work in the church.

And so it came to be. Carrying the torch of his mentor into the future, Orlando Harms:

- Served as primary Mennonite Brethren publisher in North America for over thirty years. John F. Harms was the first editor of the *Zionsbote* and Orlando the last;
- Taught in two Kansas colleges;
- Served as ordained minister and active conference worker;
- Promoted missions, evangelism, and church planting;
- Advocated support for feeding the hungry and peace education.

Orlando reflects well the image of J. F. Harms, both in this book and his life. Both were good publishers; they thought in similar terms and shared a common Christian vision. Through this story Orlando has preserved the witness of a primary leader in the Mennonite Brethren Church. We owe a debt of gratitude to two members of the Harms family who together have served and shaped a vision for the Mennonite Brethren Church for nearly a century.

— Wesley Prieb
August, 1984

Acknowledgements

A writer is indebted to many sources for the information and inspiration needed to write a book. Some of these become so much a part of him that he is no longer able to identify them. Others are very obvious and should be acknowledged specifically.

For the assignment to write about the life of John F. Harms, made more than fifteen years ago, I am first of all indebted to the Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. Because of occupational busyness and pressure, the assignment had to wait until my retirement.

For free access to the available materials dealing with the life of John F. Harms I am indebted to Wesley J. Prieb, director of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies at Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kan., and to the helpful library staff of the college.

For the helpful interviews with people who had known Harms over the years I am indebted to the late J.W. Vogt, the late Mrs. Margaret Jantzen Wiens Pauls, A. E. Janzen, Wesley J. Prieb, Mrs. Katherina Prieb and Eva Weinmeister.

For unfailing encouragement to produce this book and kind forbearance while doing it, I am indebted to my wife Erna, our son James and his wife Elaine, and our daughter Marilyn and her husband Richard Jeppesen. To our son Robert of the history faculty of Yale University, New Haven, Conn., I am especially indebted for his repeated reading and incisive critiquing of the individual chapters and for offering expert and helpful suggestions and direction for the entire project.

For faithfully typing the manuscript, I am indebted to Ruth Schultz Funk.

— Orlando Harms
March, 1984



John F. Harms.

Introduction

On January 6, 1860 twenty-five believers met in a private home in the village of Elisabethtal in the Molotschna settlement of the Russian Ukraine. The purpose of their meeting was to consider their formal secession from the existing Mennonite church. Each of the twenty-five, influenced by the pietistic revival of the time, had undergone a life-changing conversion experience. On the basis of Scripture they had also come to the conviction that they could no longer fellowship or take communion with the existing church which had become largely decadent and spiritually lifeless.

At the morning session of this meeting a document of secession which had been drafted by Abraham Cornelsen, a teacher in Elisabethtal, was read, discussed and prepared for signature. However, realizing the far-reaching implications of this move, and the recriminations which could follow, those present spent the entire afternoon in ardent prayer. Toward evening the document was read again, following which it was signed by eighteen of the twenty-five family heads present. This constituted the beginning of the Mennonite Brethren Church. Despite early difficulties within and opposition from without, the church grew and spread throughout the Mennonite settlements of Russia.

Beginning some thirteen years later about 18,000 Mennonites left Russia for the United States and Canada between 1873 and 1884 because of political, economic and religious uncertainties. Among these were some 1,200 Mennonite Brethren who settled in the midwestern United States and established churches wherever they settled. These churches were frequently widely scattered, small and weak in leadership. Because of the rigors of pioneer life and the lack of communica-

tion facilities they had little contact with each other. Leaders of the churches felt the need for an organized relationship among the churches as well as a forum to discuss and make decisions regarding common concerns.

Thus in 1878 Peter Regier, leader of the church in the present-day Henderson, Neb., area, invited representatives from the churches of Dakota, Minnesota and Kansas to Nebraska for the first conference gathering of Mennonite Brethren in North America. Four representatives came from Kansas, none from Dakota or Minnesota, and seven represented Nebraska. Because of the inequitable representation and the disagreement of those not present with some of the decisions made, later conferences did not accept the 1878 session as an official conference. It was, however, an important forerunner for the first official conference, whose delegation met, also in Nebraska, in 1879. Thereafter conference sessions were held regularly.

From the very beginning Mennonite Brethren had manifested great missionary zeal. Thus at the very first official conference in 1879 the delegates passed a resolution "that our Conference begin missionary work, that an evangelist be engaged and weekly offerings be held to defray such incurred expenses." As early as 1882 the delegates showed their concern for overseas missions (called "foreign missions") by voting to give one third of the annual conference *Liebesmahl* (love meal) offering to Baptist missions in India, since Mennonite Brethren had no "foreign mission" program of their own. In 1884 the delegates voted to support one missionary on the Baptist field in India with \$100, and in 1885 they voted to support two with \$100 each. At the 1895 conference the Missions Committee announced that they had settled on a location for a mission station among the Comanche Indians in Oklahoma. Thereupon the delegates voted to appropriate \$800 for a missionary residence and a church and \$500 as salary for the resident missionary. At the same time the delegates also voted to supply partial financial support to Mennonite Brethren members working under other mission boards in India and the Cameroons of Africa. At the 1898 conference a great day arrived for Mennonite Brethren missions when the delegates voted to send the first missionary couple to India to open a Mennonite Brethren

mission field and thus to begin what came to be the large foreign mission program of the Mennonite Brethren Conference.

Judging from the records, the 1884 conference seems to have been one at which major beginnings were made to meet a number of Conference needs. One need was communication. Delegates elected a committee to see to it that Conference decisions and reports of the work in the churches would be communicated to the scattered churches. The committee concluded that the only way to fulfill this mandate was to establish a Conference periodical. Thus they began the *Zionsbote*, which remained the official organ of the Mennonite Brethren for eighty years. Twenty years later the conference delegates and the churches endorsed the establishment of a Conference publishing house to produce and disseminate the *Zionsbote* and other Christian literature.

Another need which surfaced at the 1884 conference was Christian higher training for Mennonite Brethren young people. A private school association which had been established was highly commended by several delegates, following which the entire delegation endorsed the association and wished it God's blessing. This was the first step of Conference action endorsing Christian higher education. The next step came when the conference approved the move toward affiliation with McPherson (Kan.) College by taking charge of the German department there. After this affiliation had been discontinued, a nucleus from among those who had studied in the German department founded a school association which resulted in the establishment of Tabor College.

Since some Mennonite Brethren had experienced suffering and want in Russia and in the early years in America, they understood the need for compassion and help toward the needy and were ever ready to contribute according to their means. This was especially true in times of famine in Russia and elsewhere when huge efforts and contributions were made through the missions treasury, through various individuals who had a burden for suffering mankind, and after 1920 also through the Mennonite Central Committee.

Insight into all the foregoing and other developments can be gained by looking at the life of one remarkable individual

who was involved in all of these developments and stands out as a prism of North American Mennonite Brethren history of this period — John F. Harms.

John F. Harms joined the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1884, attended his first of many conferences and began his activity for God and the Conference that year. A natural leader. Harms was soon in the vanguard of Conference progress and projects. He was a member of the committee which launched the *Zionsbote* and served as its first editor and publisher for more than twenty years. He was also the moving force which brought about the establishment of a Conference publishing house. In missions, Harms was a member of the committee which looked for and established the first mission project of the Conference among the Comanche Indians in Oklahoma. He served as committee treasurer for this project as well as the project of sending the first missionary couple to India. In education, Harms supported and served as treasurer of the school association working toward a Mennonite Brethren institution of higher education. Later it was Harms who made the contact out of which grew the affiliation with McPherson College and eventually Tabor College. Still later he was one of the chief organizers and the first teacher of the Herbert Bible School in Saskatchewan. In evangelism, he spent several years in itinerant evangelistic and mission work in Saskatchewan and North Dakota. In relief work, he repeatedly urged the readers of the *Zionsbote* to help relieve human suffering by sending money for the needy. He packed boxes and more boxes of relief clothing for the needy in Siberia and sent thousands of dollars' worth of relief money and packages to the starving people of Russia. As a minister, Harms served as church leader (pastor) of three churches and was responsible for organizing two Mennonite Brethren churches. Harms was also a member of the committee which organized the Conference into districts and reunited them as a General Conference.

In summary, John F. Harms was a vital founding and driving force in bringing a host of accomplishments into being for God and the Mennonite Brethren Conference. His life and personal experiences help to define the nature of the times through which he lived.

PART ONE

Beginnings in
Russia

1

Background and Preparation

In the rural town of Hillsboro in central Kansas, a fourteen by eighteen-inch white marble slab stands inconspicuously in the Mennonite Brethren Cemetery. Its inscription reads simply:

JOHN F. HARMS

1855-1945

That's all. A name, two dates ninety years apart. Yet who can fathom or even imagine the joys, frustrations, tears and events which lie between them? And these dates span not only time but also space, for John F. Harms, who died in Kansas, was born in Russia, nearly half a world away.

Russia was an uncoordinated giant for whom 1855 was a watershed year. The Crimean War was at its height and for eleven months the allied forces of England, France, Turkey and Sardinia had laid siege to the fortified Russian city of Sevastopol. All Russian efforts to break the siege had failed. Meanwhile the allies, who had been unprepared for the cold winter of 1854, had experienced inhuman suffering and heavy casualties. Finally on September 8 the Russians surrendered Sevastopol. On September 11 they sank all their ships in the harbor, blew up their fortifications and evacuated the destroyed city.

About a year later Tsar Alexander II, who had come to power during the middle of the siege, conceded defeat and concluded the Peace of Paris by giving up the regions south of the Danube, by agreeing not to maintain a fleet nor erect fortifications, and by abandoning Russia's right of exclusive protection of Orthodox peoples in Turkey. Thus the balance of world power had been changed, and Russia had lost her military and religious influence in the region.

The end of the Crimean War, however, cleared the way for the Russian Age of Reform, which had long been brewing and was far overdue. As a result the serfs on Crown lands were freed by 1860. This was followed by an edict signed on March 3, 1861, the same day Abraham Lincoln took the oath of office as President of the United States. With this edict 47 million serfs were freed, having no education or understanding of their new freedom.

The big question which now loomed was whether the mass of liberated serfs should be given land. Although the landowners opposed the move, most serfs eventually were given some land, yet the amount was so limited that most of them could not make a living and remained laborers existing in unrelieved poverty. A few, however, became independent farmers since they now had greater liberty to acquire property. These soon found that the easiest way to wealth was to exploit the needs of their least fortunate peers by lending money at high interest, by hiring out horses and implements at unconscionable rates or by having the neighbors work for them at starvation wages. R.D. Charques in his *Short History of Russia* maintains: "The aggravation of peasant difficulties after 1861 . . . provides the principal clue to the popular mood in 1917" which brought on the revolution and communism.

While the Russian army was being battered in the Crimea, a son was born to Jacob and Anna (Foth) Harms on April 29, 1855 some three hundred miles northeast in the village of Kleefeld in the Molotschna settlement (also called colony) of the Russian Ukraine. The new baby was named Johann (John) after his grandfather and great-grandfather. Throughout most of his adult life he was known as J.F. Harms.

Young John's great-grandfather Hans (John) Harms with his young wife Maria (Fast) had emigrated from Dirschau, Prussia, in 1795 as part of the Mennonite migration to Russia between 1788 and 1870. Tradition handed down within the family is that when Hans Harms emigrated to Russia he loaded all his worldly goods onto a wheelbarrow which he and his wife laboriously pushed to the Russian border. From there the Russian government had promised to furnish transportation and board to the place of settlement.

In Prussia the Mennonites had always been a minority

treated as second-class citizens. Whenever their services were not needed, they were oppressed. Occupations open to them were restricted from time to time. In 1789 a new "Mennonite Edict" prohibited them from buying new land, basically because the Mennonites with their large families were buying large quantities of land and by being conscientious objectors were weakening the rural manpower available for military service. Fear of losing their religious heritage, especially the principle of nonresistance, made them interested when Catherine II of Russia invited settlers from western European countries to settle in the vast uninhabited areas of Russia.

In Catherine's second Manifesto of July 22, 1763 prospective settlers were extended the following rights and privileges: (1) free board and transportation from the Russian boundary to the place of settlement; (2) the right to settle in any part of the country and pursue any occupation; (3) a loan for building of houses, etc.; (4) exemption from military and civil service for "eternal ages"; (5) exemption from payment of taxes for a number of years; (6) free exercise of religious practices, and to those who founded agricultural settlements, the right to build and control their own schools and churches; (7) the right to do mission work among non-Christians (but not among Russians subject to the Orthodox Church); (8) the right of self-government for agricultural communities; (9) the right of every family to import its possessions free of duty; (10) to those who established factories with their own capital, the right to buy serfs and peasants. The government also offered each agricultural settler 176 acres of land.

Tantalizing as these rights and privileges sounded, the Mennonites received the offer with great reserve in order not to antagonize the Danzig city council, which was opposed to the emigration. Thus it was not until March 3, 1788, twenty-five years later, that the first agreement was made between the Mennonite settlers and the Russian government; and the first settlers left for Russia.

These settled in 1789 on the west bank of the Dnieper River, about 1,000 miles southeast of their former home, between the present-day cities of Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhe in the southeastern part of the Ukraine. This was the Chor-

titza, also known as the Old Colony, settlement, named after a small tributary of the Dnieper River.

In 1804 Mennonites who continued to come from Prussia, as well as residents of the Old Colony who were looking for greater opportunities, started a new settlement about seventy-five to 100 miles southeast of the Chortitza settlement. This settlement was west of the Dnieper on the Molotschnaya, a river from which the settlement derived its name. In subsequent years this became the largest and most prosperous Mennonite settlement in Russia and by 1860 was composed of some sixty villages and a number of large estates.

Great-grandfather Hans Harms and his wife settled in the village of Osterwick in the Chortitza settlement. Here Grandfather Johann (John) Harms was born in 1800.

After ten years Great-grandparents Hans Harmses moved south to the Molotschna settlement where the land was more productive and prospects for making a living were much brighter. Here they settled in the village of Blumstein as *Vollwirt* (full landowner) owning 176 acres of land. Here Johann grew up.

As a rule a village consisted of a wide unimproved main street with twenty to forty homes and farmyards on each side. The land around the village was parceled out to give all farmers an equal share of both better and poorer land. Occasionally the land of the individual farmer joined his yard. A community cowherd, usually a Russian, drove the cattle and other animals through the village to the community pasture each morning and back each evening. The church, school and some businesses were located at the edge of the village.

On the frontage land allotted each farmer he built his adjoining house and barn. In the early years these buildings were built of sod. Later sod was replaced by brick structures with red tile roofs. At the end of the barn and at right angles to it a *dveaschien* or shed was built for housing farm implements, vehicles and the like. Most yards were surrounded by a white picket or board fence. Between the gate and the front door, the summer visitor was greeted by a riot of red, white, purple, yellow, orange, blue, pink and every other color of flowers instead of lawn. This flower garden was the farmwife's pride and joy.

Having received what was considered a fair elementary education for those times, Grandfather Johann became a teacher in Blumstein. Being a teacher, however, did not necessarily mean training or competence. Anyone who could read fairly well, could write reasonably and clearly, and could also do arithmetic of sorts, could be a teacher.

After Johann's marriage to his first cousin Maria Giesbrecht, they moved to Mariental where land was still available. Here Jacob, the third of eight sons and later the father of J.F. Harms, was born on October 12, 1826. Hoping to improve their lot further, the Johann Harmses moved to Margenau shortly thereafter, again as full landowners.

Because the hard work of pioneering had priority and did not allow much interruption for school attendance, Jacob's education was only meager, which he often regretted. He had, however, learned to read and write, and for this he was thankful.

In 1851 Jacob was married to a young widow, Mrs. Franz (Foth) Isaac, in Mariental. She had one son Franz (Frank) from her previous marriage. He was seven years old when John (J.F. Harms) was born in 1855 in the village of Kleefeld, where his parents had moved in 1854.

Financially Jacob Harms was apparently successful. Some years after moving to Kleefeld he not only owned his 176 acres but also rented considerably more land. He also had two year-round Russian farmhands and others working for him, besides a girl to help in the home. In this household John grew up.

Boyhood Aberrations

When John was a boy he contracted numerous children's illnesses which made his school attendance irregular for several years. On one such occasion he was at home recuperating from the measles when a friend came to visit him. John apparently felt quite well and was tired of being cooped up, so he and his friend quietly slipped out of the house and went to play in the nearby straw pile. The weather was cold and damp and as a result of the exposure John became deathly ill. Eventually he regained his health, but his senses of taste and smell were gone and his sense of hearing was impaired for the rest of his life. In later life he had to be hospitalized at one time because

of food poisoning as a result of not having been able to taste or smell the spoilage which had rendered food he ate inedible.

John was a normal boy whose ideas were not always in accordance with those of his elders. When he was ten years old the men from Kleefeld had been assigned to rebuild a roadway damaged by flood. John's father was the "road boss" and John's job was to ride the left horse of a team hitched to a plow or earth scoop and keep the horses moving. When the workers took a brief recess John decided to run home and get a couple of melons for refreshment. Before he had gone far, work resumed and John's team stood idle. His father was greatly upset by this irresponsible act. When John came back, he was strongly reprimanded by his father with the promise of full settlement that evening. Evening came. Father had cut a sturdy switch and was ready for action. Only Mother's fervent intercession and John's desperate pleas for mercy persuaded Father to throw away the switch and say, "I forgive you."

Religious Experiences

Even as a boy of seven John had an insatiable thirst for knowledge and learning. To help meet his needs his mother began to instruct him in Bible history. One day when John and his mother were studying the story of Samuel, Mother became very serious and confided to John that he, too, was an answer to prayer. Like Hannah, she had promised the Lord that if he would give her a son, she would nurture him for the Lord's service. This made a lifelong impression on John and was no doubt partially responsible for his life of service for God and the Conference.

When John was eight years old his father gave him a copy of the German version of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. John read the book with great interest. When he came to the part where Christian gets rid of his heavy burden at the cross, he wept tears of conviction and repentance. His parents could not understand this emotional upheaval, but John nevertheless found peace with God through this unforgettable experience.

Thus 1863 became an important milestone in John's life. This was also the year during which opposition and persecution of the three-year-old Mennonite Brethren movement reached its highpoint. Having tasted the "new wine" to which

this movement testified and hearing about it from his best friends in school, whose parents were part of the movement or sympathetic to it, young John longed to attend their services which were held in homes in the nearby village of Alexanderkron. To his parents, however, the new movement represented apostasy and was a source of gross irritation. John was strictly forbidden to have any out-of-school contact with his friends who were involved with this movement. Thus, he wrote later, he missed the spiritual nurture he needed at the time.

John reached another spiritual crisis during the summer of 1872 when he was seriously ill with typhoid fever. Hell seemed to stand open before him, and in his despair he cried loudly to God for forgiveness. His parents prayed with him. Suddenly he experienced relief and peace. And there he promised God that if he would restore his health, he would serve him the rest of his life. As with many deathbed resolutions, this one soon paled when health was restored. A more lasting result of this experience was that after much prayer and thought about his future, John decided to acquiesce to the wishes of his father, drop his plans for a higher education, and fit himself into the program of village teaching which his father had outlined for him. It is doubtful whether John would have lived his life for God and the Conference, had he not changed his plans at this crossroad.

John was baptized by affusion a year later. Elder Bernhard Peters officiated and received him into the Margenau Mennonite Church. His affiliation with the Mennonite Brethren was to come later.

Education

When John was four years old, his half-brother Frank died and John inherited his *Fibel*, an illustrated German reading and writing textbook for beginners. Mother said that Frank had known the entire *Fibel* from memory and now the precocious John sought to emulate his deceased brother. With Mother's help and John's incessant efforts, he was able to read, write, count to 100 and add figures up to a total of 100 before entering school the following year. By then, too, he knew almost the entire *Fibel* from memory. His teacher, Peter Doerksen, was astounded at this beginner.

Sometimes John had to miss extended periods of school because of illness, yet after he returned he was always still ahead of his class. One day teacher Doerksen came to the Harms home to ask John's mother how she got John to learn more at home than his pupils learned in school. John, who was in the next room, heard his mother say that as soon as John was able to lift his head, he would read the Bible. Then he would tell the Bible stories to her and write them in a notebook from memory. Next he would ask her to correct his writing.

"How does he get his arithmetic?" the teacher asked.

Mother Harms told him that John had mastered addition, subtraction and multiplication. Now he was pestering her to teach him division.

During this time the Harms family employed an orphan named Helena Goossen as servant girl. She also helped John with his school work. In later life John testified that her educational knowledge had surpassed that of his mother.

Since full landowners generally had from fifty to 100 sheep which had to be herded in spring, John herded his father's flock repeatedly. It meant missing school, but John was not too concerned because keeping up with the other pupils was no problem for him. In fact, these interruptions gave him opportunity to observe nature and to read books which he took with him to the field.

John's thirst for knowledge made books an important part of his world and before long he possessed a small library of his own. Almost yearly his favorite Christmas gift was an up-graded *Fibel* which his parents ordered from Germany. Isaac Fast, a Christian bookseller from Gnadenfeld who periodically visited the villages to sell books imported from Germany, became a fatherly friend to John, who was a steady customer. John's father also purchased a number of books which John read avidly.

The Kleefeld school, which John attended, some years had more than 100 pupils with only one teacher. It was the practice to ask some of the upper level students to assist the teacher in regular class and catechetical instruction. To be appointed for this assistance was considered a special honor and required an exemplary life from the pupil. John served in this way during about half of his school attendance.

But John was not satisfied. He wanted to learn more than the Kleefeld school offered. In 1869 a horse theft was responsible for John's opportunity to attend a higher elementary school at Steinbach which the wealthy estate owner Peter Schmidt operated for his children and others.

John's father had hired a Russian to work for him. Only after the worker rode away with their best horse one night did they realize that he had presented forged credentials. They had not been able to read the Russian well enough to detect the forgery. Jacob Harms had had enough. He was now ready to have John go to Schmidt's school "especially to learn Russian" so that this wouldn't happen again. John considered himself lucky!

The landed estates did not follow the practice of having the house and barn as one unit, and so Schmidt's large estate included an elegant one-story brick house with two wings, one to the right and one to the left, coming out of the central part of the house at right angles, with a porch between the two wings. The house and wings had saddle roofs and each gable was topped with an ornate metal decoration out of which rose a stiletto-like shaft pointing toward the sky. The large brick barn, which really looked more like a business building than a barn, consisted of a large two-story building at the center with one-story wings on each side. The barn also had saddle roofs with the stiletto type of ornament gracing every gable. In front and between the two buildings was a large, well-kept lawn.

Though John was frequently invited to social functions at the main house and had full use of Schmidt's library, he lived and boarded across the road in the home of Schmidt's Mennonite gardener.

The teacher, Schmidt's son-in-law, was an educated and high-ranking socialite who was more interested in hunting and spending time at the village saloon after the hunt than in teaching. During his absences he asked John to take over his classes. Most of the non-resident pupils soon left the school because of their unhappiness with the teacher. John, however, rationalized that he had learned considerable Russian, which was the main purpose for which Father had sent him here. Aside from this, Father was not sympathetic to further educa-

tion. With others of his generation he believed that the more education one had, the more perverted one would become ("*ye geleada, ye vekeada*"), and he wanted his son to be a farmer. For John, the special joy of his stay at Steinbach was Schmidt's sizable library, which was at the complete disposal of the pupils, and of which John made the most.

Meanwhile, teacher Doerksen at Kleefeld experienced eye trouble so that he was unable to teach for a number of weeks. The village decided that something had to be done, and recognizing John Harms's teaching ability from the time he assisted in the Kleefeld school, decided that he was to be the assistant teacher to carry on during Doerksen's illness. Upon this decision, Father Harms drove to Steinbach to bring John home. John returned very reluctantly and for only one reason: to be obedient to his parents.

John began his work with the help of the blindfolded Doerksen. Doerksen, the pupils and the village were happy with the arrangement — only John was most miserable. He did not want to teach others their ABCs, he rather wanted to attend either the Russian university preparatory school at Odessa or a university in Germany.

Before long Doerksen's eyes were better and John terminated his assistance and pursued self-study of the Russian language as best he could. How he wished for Schmidt's library!

John's unhappiness affected all aspects of his life and also made his parents miserable. Above all, it began to affect his spiritual condition. His spiritual experiences began to pale, he became involved with the wrong crowd and frequented the Three Roses saloon, which was only a mile from his home and contributed heavily to his spiritual decline.

Eventually word reached Kleefeld that Schmidt at Steinbach had hired a new and well-trained teacher name Peter Neufeld. John's interest flared up. Then he could use Schmidt's library again! So back to school in Steinbach he went in 1870-71.

The school had only thirteen pupils — virtually one pupil per grade. This made it very difficult for Neufeld. Teacher Neufeld therefore asked John to serve as his assistant in the lower grades. John refused.

"I plan to do much self-study and to prepare myself for a

higher school in Odessa or Germany and would like to have you assist me," he said.

"We'll see what can be done," replied Neufeld. He gave John whatever assistance he could under inadequate circumstances.

The summer of 1872 was the fateful time when John was ill with typhoid fever.

When word reached Kleefeld that for the 1872-73 school year Peter Neufeld, the former Steinbach teacher, would be the German teacher and a man by the name of Kovaliov would teach Russian at the *Zentralschule* (high school) in Halbstadt, Jacob Harms decided that John should go to Halbstadt, especially to learn Russian. "But for this year only," he said, "for next year you get married and then teach in a village school."

Although John had made his deathbed choice, long-held dreams died hard. He found it very difficult to reconcile himself to the fact that his dreams of becoming a university professor were dead and that he would be only a village teacher. The clash between the intellectual aspirations of an intelligent young man and the stifling force of his family and community almost tore him apart. If he remained true to his decision, it would literally be the end of progress as he saw it. If he would go on to higher education, he might lose his faith and his Mennonite people, and "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mt. 16:26).

Help came for John through Neufeld, who reawakened in him an interest in teaching and asked him to assist him with his heavy teaching load. Since John had actually decided to become only a village teacher, he complied with Neufeld's request. So during the one and one-half hour recess which Neufeld took each noon, John taught music, geography, and nature studies (botany) and kept order among the pupils.

John found his greatest enjoyment at Halbstadt on Sunday afternoons when ten or so industrious young men and women would gather to discuss ethical questions. These discussions were to serve as preparation for practical service in life. They were humanistic rather than religious, and were based on a textbook, *Practical Association with People*, by Knigge. These discussions, John wrote in later life, were a very important and essential part in the maturation of his character. They

gave him unforgettable ideals which stayed with him his entire life, he said.

It was also at Halbstadt that John came into contact with the landless class problem which had developed in the Mennonite colonies in Russia. His father, a full landowner with considerable additional rented land, was in the front ranks on the landed side of the issue. John, however, was convicted by the injustices he saw the landless suffer and took their side.

When the Mennonites came to Russia each family was given 176 acres of land which, according to government stipulation, could not be subdivided. By 1859 the original 10,000 settlers had grown to 34,500 since most Mennonites had large families. Meanwhile very little land had been added to the original acreage. The natural result was that many families were soon without farmland in an agriculture-oriented society. Patronizingly the landless were given garden spots at the outskirts of the village and were known as *Anwohner*, second-class citizens who had to eke out a livelihood as laborers, artisans, renters or however possible. They had no vote since the franchise was based on land ownership, yet since taxes were levied per capita on the basis of population, a large landless family would have to pay more taxes than a small landed family. The problem was especially acute in the Molotschna settlement where in 1865 there were 2,356 landless workers and 1,384 landed farmers.

Seeking amelioration of their situation, the landless appealed to St. Petersburg and were given a sympathetic hearing. The result was that with government pressure 64,500 acres of communal lands which the landed farmers had been using were divided into eighty-eight and forty-acre farms for the landless. The solution, however, was temporary. It was only after the Chortitza and Molotschna settlements initiated a fund-raising program for the purchase of larger tracts of land in other parts of Russia for the landless and young people to settle, that the problem became less acute. These new settlements were known as "daughter colonies."

That young John was deeply moved by these socio-economic situations is shown by some of his writings sixty years later. One of these writings which pertains directly to the problem of the landless is "*Landhunger — Eine historische*

Geschichte aus der Zeit von 1800 bis 1900 unter den Molotschna Mennoniten in Sued-Russland" (Landhunger — Historical Story of the Time from 1800 to 1900 Among the Mennonites in South Russia).

John's story tells how William Ewert, a wealthy estate owner, had heard sufficient facts from his brother Henry, who was studying in Odessa, to refuse a delegation of landowners who wanted him to represent them in St. Petersburg to stop the landless in their efforts to acquire land. Ewert also portrayed an unusual curiosity toward those who had gone out of the existing Mennonite church and had joined the new group (Mennonite Brethren). The delegation warned him against any contact with this new group.

Later Ewert, his wife and their employees were converted and together with another family and others, a total of twenty, were baptized by immersion and founded a Mennonite Brethren church. Henry, who eventually accepted Christ but refused to be baptized, soon drifted back into sinful ways, evidenced by smoking and drinking. Later Henry became ill with conviction, found his way back and became a Baptist minister to the Russian people, feeling he could accomplish more among the Russians as a Baptist than as a Mennonite Brethren. William Ewert became a champion of the landless and was appointed to the *Landkommission* (Land Commission) where he served honorably for twenty-five years and was instrumental in opening up many lands for the landless. By 1895 the work had been completed and the story closes with the dissolution of the commission.

Two other writings, apparently of a socioeconomic nature and reflecting John's interest, are mentioned in an anonymous paper in the J.F. Harms files. They are: *Russlands Hungerleid* (The Grief of Hunger in Russia) and *Soziale Reformen* (Social Reforms). But it has not been possible to locate these writings.

After the close of the school year at Halbstadt in March of 1873, John was asked to become the village teacher at Lichtfelde, a small but well-to-do village near Kleefeld. The position provided an almost new brick schoolhouse with living quarters for the teacher. Upon the advice of his parents, John accepted the position.

John's education included practical training as well as

academic studies. From his reading he had concluded that it was good for everyone to learn a trade. His father thought that learning a trade would make him a better farmer, so for the summer of 1871 John was apprenticed to cabinetmaker Gerhard Friesen. Here he made some farm tools which his father liked very much and some gates which, when painted, made their farm look quite imposing, he wrote in later life.

For the summer of 1873 John's practical education took a different course when he took a job with Franz Dueck, an iron dealer from Blumenort. This was the time of year when Dueck traveled to Rostov-on-Don, about 120 miles northeast for his annual purchasing trip, and John was chosen to accompany him as his assistant. This offered traveling by ship and by train, which John, the farmer's son from the villages, had never done. More than that, for eight weeks they lived in a first-class hotel in Rostov, where the country boy learned many manners and cultural practices from his employer.

Here in Rostov John had time to observe the activity of the city and become acquainted with the theater, opera, concerts and various forms of recreation. He also encountered the class distinctions of the time, and even the class pride of fellow Mennonites, some of whom considered him inferior and refused to speak to him. He did not become bitter about this, but it made an indelible impression on him.

Dueck was buying pressed iron which had come from the Ural Mountain area by barge down the Don River. In Rostov it was reloaded onto wagons for transportation by hired ox-train to Blumenort, a distance of some 200 kilometers. John's job was to monitor the reloading and record the description of each piece and its weight. It was further his task to prepare a list of ox drivers and their addresses. He felt the job was completely out of his sphere of interest, but appreciated it because it widened his horizon.

2

Teaching, Marriage Death

After returning from Rostov, the time was fast approaching for John to begin his first year of teaching at Lichtfelde. He was getting ready for his classes and as an aid to the German language studies, had ordered forty booklets from Germany. The contents of the booklet were excellent, but it contained an objectionable military poem about which John had not known. He decided, however, to use the booklet after he pasted a sheet over the poem and informed the pupils that the booklet was for class use only and was not to be taken home. Thinking he had the problem solved, he began school with high hopes.

A few days later the burly village blacksmith came to see the new teacher. He was very upset and vowed his children would not attend a school where such a godless book was being used.

John told the pupils there would be no school tomorrow. The next day he rode to Halbstadt to confer with his former teacher, Neufeld, and others about the problem. They advised him not to use the booklets and to continue teaching as if nothing had happened, but John refused to listen. He had made up his mind and was going to quit at Christmastime! He informed his parents of his decision. They were immensely pleased. Father immediately planned to buy a farm across the roadway. John was to get married at Christmastime, move onto the farm, and everybody would be happy!

Meanwhile the village of Lichtfelde was in an uproar. Pupils were protesting John's leaving, and some of the wealthiest parents, egged on by their children, insisted that he stay.

One day the blacksmith came to school again, but this time he was meek as a lamb. In the presence of all the pupils he apologized to John, then sealed the reconciliation with a

handshake and a kiss. Then the blacksmith added that he would not object if John continued to use the booklet and that he wanted him to continue as teacher.

"It's too late for that," replied John, "my father has bought a farm for me, and I am quitting at Christmastime."

Now the excitement really began in Lichtfelde. News of the event spread throughout the Molotschna. Not knowing how to handle the situation any longer, John told the village committee that if they would go to Kleefeld and get the consent of his father, he would be willing to continue teaching. They gladly accepted this plan. The mission to John's father was successful, and John stayed on as teacher at Lichtfelde from 1873 to 1878.

The 1869-70 and 1870-71 school attendance and the two teachers during those years had had one effect on John: they had taught him to smoke. Both teachers smoked and both propounded the senseless idea that smoking and education went together. Since John wanted to be educated, he began to smoke. At Halbstadt students were not allowed to smoke, though their teacher did. When John began teaching at Lichtfelde, his former teacher from Halbstadt reminded him that now he could continue smoking without prohibition. Since he considered himself educated, John started smoking again.

One wonders — was wanting to appear educated the real reason John took up smoking or was there a deeper reason? Could it have been that though John had ostensibly given up all plans for a higher education and teaching position, his inward desire was still unsatisfied and smoking, as a university professor might, was a form of compensation? Or was his smoking a protest against the intellectually oppressive and stifling rural Mennonite mentality (even though neither the community nor the church actually prohibited smoking)? Was John trying to show that he was above the mostly uneducated populace of his world?

What about John's extreme anger at the blacksmith who objected to his use of the booklet from Germany? Was this merely an outburst of John's temper, which he said he had inherited from his father, and against which he battled throughout life? Or was this also a protest against the limiting rural Mennonite mentality in which he found himself and to

which he was apparently doomed? Was he trying to show that an uneducated village blacksmith had no right to tell him — a teacher, who had a higher social status — what to do?

John's internal motivations in these instances may well have been more deep-seated than the overt manifestations. All this, however, eventually fused with spiritual obedience to make John the man for God and the Conference he came to be.

John continued teaching and smoking until one day a father of several of his pupils and a member of the Mennonite Brethren church stopped at the school to talk to John about his habit. In a kind manner he asked John to be an example to his pupils by not smoking. John quit temporarily. When he started to smoke again, the concerned father came to him again, repeated his request, pointed John to Jesus and prayed with him. This time John fought earnestly against the habit and won the victory. He never smoked again and gave God the glory for breaking the bonds which had tied him to this habit.

John was apparently overcoming some of the problems which had been plaguing him, for in later life he wrote that, aside from 1876, these had been his happiest years.

Marriage and Death

When it seemed that John would leave teaching in 1873 his parents began planning for his marriage, but since John also needed a housekeeper at Lichtfelde, plans for a wedding were continued. The chosen bride for John was Maria Isaac, an orphan who had been employed by John's parents since 1870. There are no indications in Harms's writings that any sort of love affair or relationship existed between them. It seems to have been more a marriage of convenience than love, as was often the case in those days. Love, it was hoped, would follow marriage.

Thus on December 15, 1873 John and Maria Isaac were married in a large wedding at the Harms home in Kleefeld. Thereafter they moved to Lichtfelde.

The school building in Lichtfelde was apparently like most schoolhouses of the era, a good-sized red brick building with a red tile hip roof. Down the center of the building a hallway ran from one end to the other. On one side of the hallway was the schoolroom and on the other side was a four-room residence for

the teacher — a front room, a bedroom, another small room and a kitchen — all with white walls and wood floors. Sometimes a heater in the hallway provided heat for both sides.

This was the home into which the newlyweds John and Maria Harms settled. One year later, on December 29, 1874, a daughter was born to them. After enjoying her for only one and one-half years, she died of diphtheria in 1876. On April 4, 1876 a son was born, but lived only a few hours. Another blow followed when at Eastertime 1876 Maria died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-three. John had experienced three deaths in two months! He was devastated, depressed and hopeless. He wrote later that it had been a happy but all too brief marriage.

John's father persuaded him to spend the summer of 1876 traveling along the south coast of the Crimea with a friend, Bernhard Friesen. The travels, sights and adventures seemed to take John's mind off his sorrow, but once back home the depression returned and John found it difficult to do anything besides sit at the graves of his loved ones in the Lichtfelde cemetery.

His parents and sympathetic friends pressured him to remarry before the beginning of the new school year. But events did not proceed quite that rapidly, for John found it difficult to move ahead in the emotional state in which he found himself.

In his sorrow and depression John read and reread the biblical story of Isaac's marriage and how his servant Eleaser procured his wife for him. When he discussed the problem with his mother, she was willing to help and told John a long-held secret. Back in 1855 they had visited in another village and had met the Peter Isaacs from Grossweide. Mother Harms had little John on her lap and Mrs. Isaac had had little daughter Margaretha, also born in April 1855, on her lap. The thought had come to Mother Harms whether these might one day be a married couple. In recent times this thought had occupied her repeatedly. This gave John courage to go ahead. John and Mother agreed on the following procedure: (1) To go to where Margaretha lived to ascertain whether she was still single or whether she was in love with someone. It was found that she was still single and not in love. (2) If there were no hindrances, John would unobtrusively try to get a glimpse of Margaretha.

He accomplished this by asking for a drink of water. (3) He liked what he saw, especially her golden hair. (4) Getting permission from her parents was next accomplished. (5) The first kiss followed. (6) The bethrothal was held, and on December 2, 1876 John and Margaretha Isaac, a distant relative of his first wife, were married in the Lichtfelde schoolhouse. This marriage lasted forty-five years until Margaretha's death in 1921.

Leaving the Homeland

Perhaps the major step in the preparation of John F. Harms to become what he later was for God and the Conference was the leaving of his homeland for America.

During the second half of the 19th century the Russian government initiated two major changes which were very disturbing to the Mennonites in Russia: (1) The introduction of a universal conscription law, and (2) the inauguration of a general program of Russianization of foreign settlers in Russia. The Imperial Decree of 1870 implied the abolition of the Supervisory Commission in Odessa, which happened in 1871 when the Mennonite settlers, who had had self-government, became directly subordinated to the local and provincial Russian authorities; Russian was to be the official language of the local Colony Administrative Office (*Gebietsamt*) as well as a subject of study in all schools; and military exemption was to be terminated. By 1874 a conscription law was passed which affected all Mennonites.

Also, because of the general prosperity of the Mennonites and the extreme prosperity of some who owned estates of as many as 50,000 acres, hatred of the Mennonites became more and more acute. And with the tsar as the titular head of the Greek Catholic Church, other church organizations felt more and more threatened.

Many Mennonites recognized these threats to their future and decided the only way out was to emigrate. The result was that approximately 18,000 Mennonites emigrated from Russia to the United States and Canada between 1873 and 1884.

John and Margaretha Harms and his parents Jacob and Anna Harms had come to the conviction by 1878 that they, too, must emigrate to America where five of Jacob's six living brothers had already gone. No details of their leaving the

Molotschna and Russia are mentioned in any of Harms's writings. They were apparently not looking backward but forward to a new chapter which was about to begin.

PART TWO

Vocation in the
United States

3

Evolution of an Editor

On the evening of July 1, 1878 the *S.S. Strassburg*, coming from Bremen, Germany, docked in Hoboken, N.J., on the west shore of the North River which separates New Jersey from New York City. Among her 653 immigrant passengers from Russia were John F. and Margaretha Harms and infant son Peter and their parents Jacob and Anna Harms. They had been on the ocean fifteen and one-half days. All passengers had enjoyed good health after the first few days of seasickness. No one had died, and two babies had been born en route.

Now they had arrived in the United States of America, the land of their dreams. Here the period of reconstruction following the Civil War had ended and what has become known as the "Gilded Age" was in full swing. In New York City, in whose environs they had arrived, as well as in other urban centers of the era, capitalism was lurching forward and burgeoning corporations controlled nationwide industries by whatever means served their purposes. It was the age of the spoils system, patronage, party bosses, graft, corruption and the worship of materialism, but also the rise of the labor movement and urban growth with their attendant problems. All this was unknown to the arriving immigrants.

In Hoboken the immigrants were met by David Goerz of Halstead, Kan.; John Reimer of Mountain Lake, Minn.; C.B. Schmidt, German-speaking immigration agent of the Atchinson, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway; and A. Hoppe of the St. Paul and Sioux City Railroad Company. All had come ostensibly to help the immigrants with arrangements.

But the immigration agents were not purely humanitarian in their motives. They had been sent to lure the immigrants to settle in the areas of their respective railroads. A

total of 129 million acres of land had been distributed directly and indirectly to the railroads and intense rivalry to populate this land had developed. Immigration agents made extremely liberal concessions and sometimes even resorted to subterfuge to attract settlers, for it was only by populating their lands that the railroads could hope to build up the thriving local business upon which their future depended.

The next morning, July 2, at seven o'clock the passengers began to disembark and unloading of baggage began. Passengers and baggage were taken by ferry to Castle Garden, where all immigrants entered a large building for processing. Available in the building were water, washrooms, bread and almost anything anyone might need. In the afternoon money was exchanged and tickets to each one's destination were arranged.

The processing completed, the group was again put on board the ferry and conveyed across the river to the Erie depot in Jersey City. From the boat they went on board the waiting railroad cars. By ten o'clock that evening, with John Reimer and a Mr. Peters accompanying them, the train began rolling westward toward a new life.

In the United States this was a time of huge influx of immigrants, including some 10,000 Mennonites from Russia (1873-1884), and the settlement of the American West. It was also the time of the construction of transcontinental railroads and revolutionary changes in agriculture. Politically the United States was emerging as a world power, and religiously Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey were at the height of their Protestant evangelism.

For the Harmses the westward trek led to the rural village of Mountain Lake, Minn., about 100 miles southwest of Minneapolis, where some 295 German Mennonite families from Russia settled by 1880.

Upon arrival at Mountain Lake, Jacob Harms bought a farm for himself and John from his brother-in-law. Both moved onto the farm and it appeared that finally the long-held wish of Jacob Harms would become reality. It looked as if John would become a farmer!

Further Preparation

But appearances are sometimes deceiving, and so was this

one. During this first year on the farm John again came to the conclusion that farming was not his vocation. With Margaretha's concurrence they moved to Mountain Lake and John conducted a small parochial school "in Lichtfelder manner." Here also John and merchant Abram Penner concocted a plan to publish a German paper. (Since the Russian Mennonites used only the High German of Martin Luther's Bible in their church services and since this was the only language most of them could read, all books, newspapers and publications for the Mennonite immigrants were printed in German.) John would do the editing and writing and Penner would supply the funds. To begin with, the printing was to be done in St. Paul. When this presented difficulties, the plan fizzled.

A little later John was offered an opportunity to become the editor of a new German publication which John F. Funk, the (Old) Mennonite publisher at Elkhart, Ind., was establishing as a direct successor to the *Nebraska Ansiedler*. John jumped at the chance and moved to Elkhart with his family. He named the new periodical *Mennonitische Rundschau* (Mennonite Observer). The first issue appeared on June 5, 1880. Its purpose was to serve all Mennonites in the newly established Russian Mennonite communities in the prairie states and Manitoba. It was to be a link between them and Russia and also between each other. To do this it reported current events from the different Mennonite settlements, both in America and Russia. The paper was a four-page, sixteen by twenty-five-inch folio published twice a month for a subscription price of twenty-five cents a year. In 1883 it became a weekly publication.

Since the *Rundschau* was only a four-page semi-monthly, Harms's job also included serving as editorial assistant for the *Herold der Wahrheit* (*Herald of Truth*), the official German organ of the (Old) Mennonite Conference. Working with the *Herold*, which was more theological in nature than the *Rundschau*, Harms soon realized that he needed more biblical and theological training. With Funk's consent he attended the Evangelical Bible Institute in Naperville, Ill., from 1882 to 1884 while continuing to edit the *Rundschau* in absentia.

Instead of returning to Elkhart after the 1884 school year, John and Margaretha Harms moved to central Kansas and set-

tled in the rural village of Canada. A plat for the town of Canada had been filed on December 15, 1883, with the railroad, which was completed in June 1879, running through the north part of the town, but the town was never incorporated and never exceeded 100 in population. It was composed of Mennonites and others, mostly Germans. Despite its small population the town in its early years had a general store also selling hardware and farm implements, a lumber and coal dealer, a hotel, a tinning shop, a blacksmith shop, a telegraph and express office and two grain elevators. Two doctors settled in Canada, one of whom also operated a drugstore. For about a year (1886-87) the village also had a newspaper, the *Arcade*, which was printed partly in English and partly in German. From 1884 to 1954 Canada also had a post office. Today Canada is a rural residential community of about thirty people with only a grain business.

Here John and Margaretha and family settled and John managed a lumber business while he continued to edit the *Rundschau* until 1885. When the lumber business was sold, he conducted a private German school in his home during the winter of 1885-86. Among his students were such later Mennonite Brethren leaders as John H. Pankratz (missionary to India), A.L. Schellenberg (Conference editor) and M.M. Just (church and Conference leader). John F. Funk still wanted Harms to return to editorial work in Elkhart, but Harms found himself unable to move in this direction.

One reason was that Harms's spiritual orientation had changed. He and Margaretha had undergone a conversion experience while in Elkhart, where they had joined the (Old) Mennonite Church. After a visit by his cousin John Harms and wife at Naperville, J.F. felt a special spiritual affinity for the Mennonite Brethren.

J.F.'s cousin John Harms was a young schoolteacher in the French Creek area north of Hillsboro, Kan., five miles west of Canada in 1880. He had recently been elected to the ministry of the French Creek Mennonite Church (not Mennonite Brethren). When a revival broke out in the community, John Harms and his young wife Jacobina soon became involved. After searching the Scriptures, some of the new converts came to the conviction that baptism by immersion was the biblical

mode to follow. Thus on Easter Sunday, April 17, 1881 twelve candidates were baptized by immersion. The following Sunday another baptism was held for twenty-two candidates. Among them were John and Jacobina Harms. On Monday, April 25, 1881 the thirty-four newly baptized individuals met with Elder Abraham Schellenberg, who lived about forty miles west of Hillsboro and had performed the baptisms, and organized a new church — the Johannestal (John's Valley) Church of French Creek — with John Harms as its leader. This was the beginning of the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church. Those who still remember John Harms's preaching report that he was the most silver-tongued orator and Bible expositor they have ever heard. He soon became a leading evangelist and proponent of the Mennonite Brethren.

Thus while living in Canada, Kan., J.F. and Margaretha worshiped with the Mennonite Brethren meeting in a stone schoolhouse east of Canada where Jacob Ehrlich was leader. On June 29, 1884 Ehrlich baptized them by immersion in the South Cottonwood River near the school and J.F. and Margaretha Harms became members of the Mennonite Brethren Conference.* Eighteen years later J.F. revisited the now unused schoolhouse and in an emotional poem in the *Zionsbote* of October 29, 1902 rehearsed the blessings they had experienced at this place. The poem closed (free translation without rhyme):

Many a storm has been met,
Many a steep hill been climbed,
Since those days of the past.
Yet what there we experienced
In hours of rich blessing,
We've never had cause to regret.

In 1885 Harms discontinued his *Rundschau* editorship.

*The term "conference" is used in a two-fold way by Mennonite Brethren. Generally the term "Conference" (upper case) refers to the body and organization which constitute the denomination. The term "conference" (lower case) refers to the periodic representative gathering of the Conference or a segment of it.

Struggling to Serve God and the Conference

At the 1884 Mennonite Brethren conference, just four months after his rebaptism, J.F. Harms was an active delegate and was elected as one of four conference secretaries. When the need for a history of the Mennonite Brethren Church was affirmed by a number of delegates, the conference assigned the task to a committee of three, including Harms. This committee was also to look after the publication of the conference minutes and reports of the various activities in the churches. When the committee learned later that the brethren in Russia were also preparing a history, the project was dropped.

Since Mennonite Brethren were widely scattered throughout Kansas, Nebraska, Dakota, Minnesota and Manitoba the new committee felt that in order to get activity reports to the churches and to maintain a working Conference unity as well as unity of faith and practice, it was necessary to have a conference-wide periodical for regular communication. Once this was clear to them, the committee met repeatedly and finally decided: (1) to establish a Conference periodical, (2) to name the periodical *Zionsbote* (Messenger of Zion), and (3) to have J.F. Harms be its editor. Thus the first Mennonite Brethren publication was conceived in 1884, and publication efforts of the Mennonite Brethren Conference were begun.

At this conference J.F. Harms also spoke strongly in favor of a Conference school and urged the churches to support the initial efforts in this regard which had been begun by the church at Goessel, Kan. This church had initiated a school association which later spread throughout the Conference; but since few understood or appreciated higher education and others could not afford it or shied away from paying the \$2 per quarter membership levy, J.F. Harms, the treasurer of the society, had a difficult time raising the necessary funds. The association had undertaken to support Peter H. Wedel, a young Mennonite Brethren evangelist from the Goessel church, while attending the Baptist Seminary in Rochester, N.Y., for three years. It was hoped that upon completion of his studies Wedel would begin the Mennonite Brethren school of higher education. During the summer months Wedel served very effectively as an evangelist in the churches of the Conference.

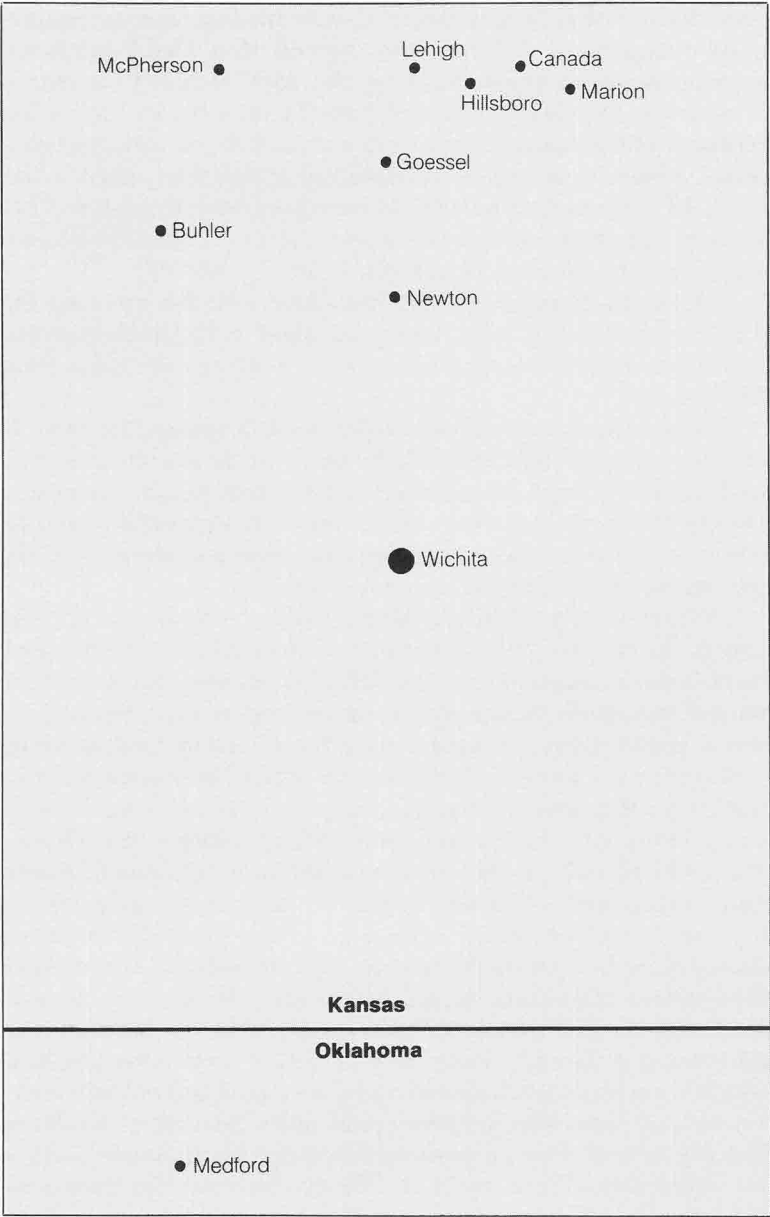
Because of his success as an evangelist the 1890 confer-

ence decided that Wedel should devote his full time to Conference evangelism. After it was agreed that the Conference would reimburse the society for the \$400 it had paid out to Wedel, the association released him. Though the money in the treasury of the association was designated for educational purposes, plans for a higher educational school had died on the vine. J.F. Harms had personally benefited from the association since it had given him partial support for his school in Canada, Kan., in 1885-86, and in Lehigh, Kan., in 1886-87.

With the founding of the *Zionsbote*, the die was cast for J.F. Harms. He was inextricably involved with the Mennonite Brethren, and his involvement was to continue for more than fifty years.

When the first issue of the *Zionsbote* appeared in 1885, it was a four-page quarterly that was sent to the churches in packages for local distribution. The subscription price was twenty-five cents per year, which individuals in the churches were to pay. After two years the *Zionsbote* became a monthly periodical and in 1889 it became a weekly.

While still in Canada, Kan., Harms also began a local paper, the *Marion County Anzeiger* (Advertiser) (later changed to *Hillsboro Anzeiger*). In the fall of 1886 the Harms family moved to Lehigh, about eleven miles west of Canada. Lehigh was a larger town having a population of 516 in 1885 and was experiencing a boom, largely because of the Mennonite concentration in the area. The town had a full roster of businesses and a Mennonite Brethren church, the first Mennonite Brethren town church in America, erected in 1884. Here Harms again conducted a German school for one year in addition to his publishing ventures. After this school year, Harms concluded that he was really not an apt schoolman and should discontinue his efforts as a teacher. He consequently moved his family to McPherson in 1887, a larger town about twenty miles west of Lehigh. Here he established a printing plant in which he printed the *Zionsbote*, the *Anzeiger* and did job work. Up to this time the *Zionsbote* had been printed in Elkhart, Ind., by John F. Funk's printing plant, the Mennonite Publishing Company. Thus John F. Harms became the first and pioneer publisher and printer of Mennonite Brethren publications.



Southcentral Kansas and northcentral Oklahoma.

In McPherson Harms produced not only the *Marion County Anzeiger* but also started the *McPherson Anzeiger*. According to James C. Juhnke in his book, *A People of Two Kingdoms*, Harms ambitiously planned also to produce a *Newton Anzeiger* to blanket the entire central Kansas Mennonite community. The outside two of the paper's four pages were to be the same in all editions while the two inside pages were to contain local news and correspondence. The *Newton Anzeiger*, however, never got off the ground since Ulrich Hege, Harms's former associate, beat Harms to the draw by establishing his own *Newton Anzeiger*. When Harms began to put out a rival *Harvey County Anzeiger* in June 1888, he drew bitter fire from Hege.

During the period of his *Anzeiger* editorship (1887-1897) Harms was more active and influential in politics than at any other time of his life. Juhnke says that during this period Harms's "newspaper editorship was the most visible — and possibly the most significant — politicizing force among Kansas Mennonites."

According to Juhnke, Harms was an outspoken protectionist in the 1888 national election campaign in which President Grover Cleveland advocated protective tariff reduction. Harms, who had become a naturalized citizen on May 31, 1888, grounded his position in an openly nationalistic point of view, stating that "America's interests are closer to our heart than those of Styria or Prussia." This position and Harms's advice to his readers to vote a straight Republican ticket in 1888 was grist for other local editors and politicians to oppose, attack and scoff at Harms, embroiling him in a lively campaign.

Other political manifestations Harms tackled during these years were the farmers' alliances which had begun forming in the 1870s and expanded rapidly after about 1885. Their purpose was to restore farm prosperity which had been persistently dropping. They blamed their troubles on excessive railroad charges, high interest rates, unreasonable profits of merchants and middlemen, and some kind of money conspiracy to keep the currency supply inadequate. The alliance groups united under the National Farmers Alliance in 1880 and established cooperatives of various types, arranged social gatherings, disseminated agricultural information, and influenced

legislation. By 1890 independent farmers' parties made their appearance in several states and had some success in winning elections. The result encouraged leaders to establish the Populist (People's) Party in 1891 and to convert the Farmer's Alliance into a wing of that political organization. The party platform adopted in 1892 called for government ownership of the railroads and the telephone and telegraph systems, free silver, a graduated income tax, a "sub-treasury" plan to allow farmers to withhold crops from the market when prices were low, the direct election of U.S. senators, immigration restriction, an eight-hour day for industrial workers, and other reforms.

It is somewhat surprising that Harms, who had taken the side of the "landless" in Russia, felt that on scriptural grounds he could not support the Farmers' Alliance nor the Populist Party. He saw the alliance reforms as a kind of socialism sharply distinguished from the socialism of apostolic times. Populism in his view was dangerous and pointed toward a "state welfare-institution for all people," according to Juhnke.

Juhnke also notes that as Harms approached the end of his *Anzeiger* editorship in 1897, he seemed to have lost his relish for politics. That he was now more interested in directly serving God and the Conference was verified in later life when on a number of occasions Harms expressed concern that Mennonite Brethren were becoming too politically oriented and involved. For this he blamed himself, saying that he was the one who, in his papers, had introduced participation in political strife. "I see it differently now, I should never have done this," he once opined to J.W. Vogt, his pastor from 1936 until his death.

Harms's *Hillsboro Anzeiger*, however, had the distinction of being the only one of five German newspapers established in central Kansas in the 1880s to last more than five years. Of these early Kansas editors Sondra Van Meter says in *Marion County Kansas Past and Present*:

It took only a hand-operated press, a few stickfuls of type and a few dollars to start a newspaper in Kansas in the 1880's. If the editor could attract enough local subscriptions, he could earn as much per week as a wheat harvest hand in July. Newspaper history in Hillsboro was very similar to that in other

towns of comparable size. Mortality rate of newspapers was high, but regardless of that, someone was always willing to take the chance on running a successful paper.

Two years after coming to McPherson, Harms moved his family, printing plant and business to Hillsboro, twenty-six miles east of McPherson. One reason for his many moves was to try to find a place where he could make a living for himself and his family with his small printery while producing the *Zionsbote*.

Hillsboro had been founded in 1879 on an eighty-acre tract of land located along the McPherson and Marion Railroad. John G. Hill had bought the plot for \$680. On June 24, 1879 Hill filed the plat for the town, and five years later Hillsboro was incorporated as a third-class city with 600 residents. A partial list of Hillsboro business establishments in the 1880s included four general grocery and dry goods stores, four newspapers (mostly German, and not all at the same time), two furniture stores (one of which was also an undertaking business), two drug stores, a mercantile store, a shoemaker, a creamery, a lumberyard, a poultry and egg business, two doctors, two blacksmith shops, two flour mills (one steam operated and one wind operated), a hotel and a livery stable. In this prairie town J.F. Harms settled and continued to print the *Zionsbote* and the *Anzeiger* and to do job work.

In the *Zionsbote* Harms remained aloof from partisan politics. In his mind there apparently was a clear delineation between a religious periodical and a newspaper. In his personal life he was meticulous in his delineation of what was proper for the Christian, at times to the point of legalism. He apparently applied this same yardstick to his editing of the *Zionsbote*.

In its early years the *Zionsbote* reported more world news than in later years, perhaps because most of its German readers had few, if any, other sources of such news; however, the news was informational rather than partisan and showed Harms's worldwide view. Much of the news pointed out needs and situations for Christian or humanitarian assistance. News about Russia was dominant for many years because most of the readers had come from Russia and many still had relatives

and friends there. As early as 1896 Harms offered to send relief funds to Russia following a report of severe famine among some of the exiled brethren there. This he also did following reports of famine in India, Bulgaria and other places around the world.

Missions always occupied a prominent place in the *Zionsbote* even before Mennonite Brethren had their own mission program. Reports from the Cameroons of Africa, India and many other places around the world were reprinted from other periodicals and no doubt helped awaken and foster a missions consciousness among Mennonite Brethren. Later, reports from Mennonite Brethren missions were always prominent.

Correspondence from the Mennonite Brethren churches in America and Russia detailing their activities were a prominent part of the *Zionsbote* and served to bind together the Mennonite Brethren in these countries.

Reports of conversion experiences also were prominent in the early *Zionsbote* since Mennonite Brethren placed a strong emphasis upon traumatic conversion. Travel reports, articles about the Sunday school and Sunday school teaching, church music and the nurture of young people as well as articles on current social and moral issues such as the death penalty and lodges were frequent fare for readers of the *Zionsbote* and showed the breadth of Harms's interest and views. Though the *Zionsbote* had no regular editorial section, editorial opinions were often expressed by comments or footnotes.

Whatever else the *Zionsbote* might contain, primary emphasis was always on articles of scriptural exposition or interpretation which occupied prime space in every issue. That it was to be a religious periodical with a spiritual impact was unmistakable and inviolable.

The *Zionsbote* was actually a quasi-official publication of the Mennonite Brethren Conference, produced and edited by Harms in his private printing plant. It was to be financed by privately paid subscriptions without regular financial support from the Conference. The Conference, however, elected the Publication Committee and gave moral and advisory support and considered the *Zionsbote* its official organ and thus made decisions regarding it.

One problem Harms faced continually and which made his financial existence lumpy throughout his editorship of the *Zionsbote* was the fact that too many readers were perpetually delinquent in paying their subscriptions. Even as late as 1905, for example, the *Zionsbote* contained the headline "\$476.35" in its December 6 issue. The ensuing article went on to explain that this amount was delinquent in unpaid subscriptions and if not paid soon, the publishing house would have to find another way to operate. Notices like this appeared repeatedly, indicating that this was a constant struggle.

Since the Mennonite Brethren churches in Russia did not have a periodical of their own until 1903 when publication of the *Friedensstimme* (Voice of Peace) began, the *Zionsbote* found good reception in Russia from its beginning. A report at the 1889 conference, for example, showed that \$121.41 had been received from Russia for *Zionsbote* subscriptions, while \$191.75 had come from America. Articles, correspondence, travel reports and other writings contributed to the *Zionsbote* came from both Russia and America. Thus the *Zionsbote* was a vital link between the churches of Russia and America for the first twenty years of its existence.

Personal Tragedy — But Life Goes On

The years in Hillsboro contained personal events that continued to mold Harms's character. One of these was a personal tragedy which struck the Harms family in 1891 when the oldest son Peter died in a swimming mishap about one mile from Lehigh on Sunday, July 12.

John F. Harms and his two oldest sons, Peter, nearly fourteen, and Sam, ten, had walked the six miles from Hillsboro to Lehigh that morning, arriving there at eight o'clock. On the way they had memorized and discussed Romans 8:4: "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit."

The reason for their walk to Lehigh was to visit the boys' sisters and especially little Menno, who were making their home with relatives in Lehigh while Mrs. Harms was in New York en route to Russia to visit her aged mother and her brothers and sisters. A group of four Mennonite Brethren

ministers from Russia had visited America and were returning, and this offered her the opportunity to go with them.

During the afternoon Sunday school hour at the Lehigh church, Peter and some other boys had made a clandestine arrangement to go swimming after Sunday school. When Peter came to ask permission of his father to go to the home of one of the other boys, Harms was reluctant to grant it because they still had to walk back to Hillsboro before dark. Peter assured him he would be back by five o'clock, allowing plenty of time to get home. Harms gave his hesitant consent, and off the boys went — not only to the other boy's home but to the swimming hole. The day was hot and their rush to get to the swimming hole and back by five o'clock made the boys even hotter.

At the swimming hole one of the boys stepped into the shallow water. Peter urged him to go into the deep water. When he didn't Peter said, "I came here to go swimming," and stormed into the deep water. And that was it! He went under, came up twice, then without having made a sound, remained under. The scared boys ran back to town with leaden feet — and concerned men rushed back to the swimming hole, but it was too late. Peter's life had expired. A doctor who was called found no water in Peter's lungs. His diagnosis was sudden cardiac arrest, the result of hitting the cold water while extremely hot.

Since Mrs. Harms was still in New York, J.F. sent a telegram to her hotel informing her of Peter's death and giving her the option of continuing on to Russia or returning home. She promptly canceled the trip and returned to Hillsboro but arrived after Peter had been buried. The funeral had been held at four o'clock on the day after Peter's death, with burial in the small Lehigh Mennonite Brethren Church Cemetery west of town.

In writing about the incident in the *Zionsbote*, Harms said that for himself he had accepted this incident as God's way to cleanse and mold him. As far as Peter was concerned, he said he was unable to find his way. Peter had frequently been admonished and touched by the gospel, but had never made a definite commitment to Christ as far as he knew. This left little hope for Peter's eternal welfare in Harms's understanding of the Scriptures.

There was another problem. Peter had met his death while going swimming on Sunday. Not only was Sunday swimming a forbidden activity according to Mennonite Brethren legalism of the day, it was also a very adverse reflection on J.F. Harms as a Mennonite Brethren lay minister and spiritual leader. So seriously did this incident affect Harms, according to some of his family, that he virtually disowned Peter. Some lists of his family which he made later in life do not include Peter's name, whether for this reason or whether he intended to list only his living family, no one knows.

For the rest of the Harms family, life went on, and on August 24, 1891 John and Margaretha transferred their church membership to the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church. By this time Harms had become very active in the Mennonite Brethren Conference and was extensively used in preaching. In the Hillsboro church he had been elected Sunday school superintendent and also served as the first choir director of the church. In 1892 he was elected leader (pastor) of the church. At the September 23, 1894 congregational meeting the matter of Harms's political involvement was brought up when he was considered for reelection. It was observed that he had improved in this regard; whereupon, he was reelected to serve as minister and leader. This position he apparently retained until moving away from Hillsboro in 1899.

Since Harms had served as an unordained lay minister and church leader for a number of years, October 11, 1896 was a great day in his life. It was then that he, together with his cousin John Harms, was ordained to the ministry. The Hillsboro church had erected a large tent for the occasion and special services were held in the forenoon, afternoon and evening. The ordination with the laying on of hands by Elder Abraham Schellenberg of the Ebenezer church, some forty miles west of Hillsboro, and Elder Johann Foth of the nearby Ebenfeld church, was held in the forenoon. Simple meals were served at noon and after the afternoon service.

The Harmses had long planned and dreamed of visiting their former homes and especially Margaretha's relatives in Russia, since her first attempt to visit them had ended so abruptly. In 1897 these plans became reality. They left on December 21 and arrived in Russia on December 31 via Rotter-

dam, Holland and Berlin. In several brief reports in the *Zionsbote* during their trip, Harms wrote that all of Mrs. Harms's brothers and sisters had been together at the silver wedding anniversary celebration of the Klaas Isaacs (brother) in Schoenau. He also reported that he had preached a total of thirty-nine times in many places including such well-known villages as Schoenau, Rueckenau, Lichtfelde, Alexanderkrohn, Kleefeld, Andreasfeld, Einlage and Ohrloff. The Harmses also visited and ministered in Poland en route home.

Before leaving for Russia Harms had made arrangements with the Publications Committee that during his four-month absence D.D. Bartel of McPherson would serve as editor of the *Zionsbote* with the assistance of J.F. and P.F. Duerksen. Printing and mailing was also to be done in McPherson with Harms's children Sam and Anna in charge. After the April 27, 1898 issue, the *Zionsbote* was again published in Hillsboro as the Harmses had returned home.

4

Establishing a Conference Publishing House

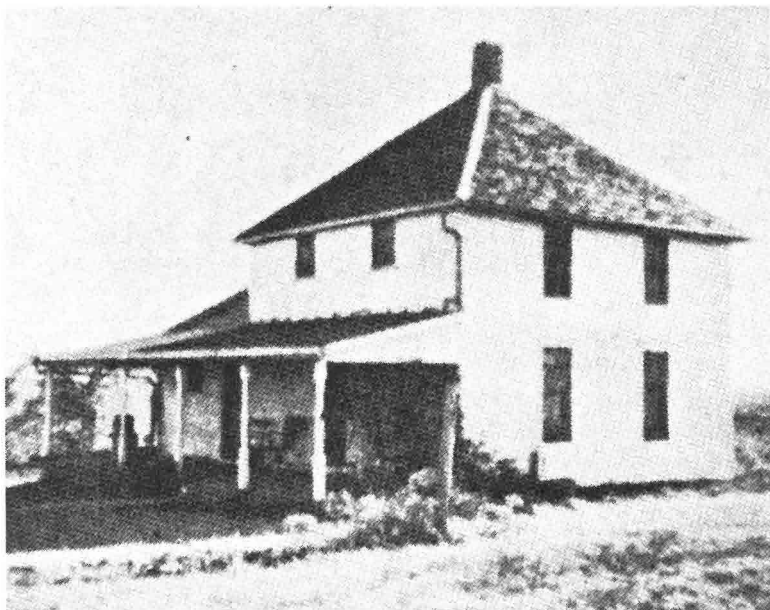
From time to time Harms showed interest when new Mennonite settlements were established. In the fall of 1893 the Cherokee Strip in northern Oklahoma had been opened for settlement, and the following spring several Mennonite Brethren families settled at Medford, about fifteen miles south of the Kansas-Oklahoma border. Among these was David Harms, first cousin of John F. Harms, and his family.

Without any previous public notice, John F. Harms reported in the *Zionsbote* of October 29, 1899 that they, too, had moved to Medford and had settled on a farm two and one-half miles northeast of town. He attributed the move to "family conditions" on which he did not elaborate. All reports, correspondence and subscriptions pertaining to the *Zionsbote* were henceforth to be sent to him at Medford.

Once again J.F. Harms was going to try his hand at farming, and apparently went to Medford with high hopes. An old grandmother, who worked for the Harmses as a girl, told this writer that when Harms came to Medford he had said he would show these people how to farm. "But," she said laughingly, "he never made it. He was no farmer. He was an editor, teacher and preacher." She also told how her sixteen-year-old brother, who worked for Harms as a farmhand, had frequently laughed at his amateurish methods.

Harms's inadequate type cases and meager printing equipment went with him to Medford. A small lean-to was added to the square white frame two-story house in which the Harmses lived. This lean-to constituted the printing plant where the *Zionsbote* was produced.

Abe Heinrichs of Enid, Okla., who was a hired hand on the Harms farm in the early years, told this writer how the



The Harmses' house near Medford; the lean-to printshop is barely visible to the left side of the house.

Zionsbote was printed at Medford. Several girls would set up two pages in handset type during the day. In the evening, after working in the field all day, Heinrichs would print these two pages on an ancient hand-fed and hand-powered platen press whose leverage had been increased with a long hedge pole. Someone would insert a sheet of paper, then the burly young Heinrichs would bring down the hedge pole and create the inked impression (two side-by-side printed pages). This would continue till as many sheets were printed as needed. The next day the two pages of type would be dismantled, replaced in the cases and another two pages of type would be set up. (There was not enough type to set up more than two pages at one time.) The next evening Heinrichs would print another two pages. This process would continue until the particular issue of the *Zionsbote* was finished. Folding and collating were also done by hand.

The *Zionsbote* was now a weekly of four pages with an intermittent two-page monthly supplement. With many sub-

scriptions constantly in arrears and insufficient capital for operation, let alone improvements, it is not difficult to see that maintaining its production had become a gargantuan problem.

A Conference Publishing House Becomes Reality

For several years leaders of the Conference had seen that the present arrangement for printing the *Zionsbote* could not continue indefinitely and had sought ways for the Conference to acquire its own publishing house. At the 1901 conference three private Mennonite Brethren printers — J.F. Harms, Medford, Okla., P.F. Duerksen, Hillsboro, Kan., and H.H. Neufeld, Winkler, Man., all made their businesses available for the Conference to begin its publishing house. The conference decided to amalgamate the three businesses into a Conference publishing house and to raise capital through private free-will contributions. But when the Publication Committee sought to carry out the decision of the Conference “various hindrances appeared” (We have not been able to ascertain what these were) and the plan for a Conference publishing house collapsed.

J.F. Harms stood helpless and discouraged with his worn out and inadequate equipment. Even his faith in the plans of the Conference had been shattered. It is no wonder that the yearbook of the 1903 conference at Henderson, Neb., reported that “J.F. Harms gave a summary of the situation of the *Zionsbote* and stated that he would no longer be able to edit and produce the periodical as he had in the past and was therefore giving it back into the hands of the Conference from which he had received it nineteen years ago.”

The Conference was on the spot! But there was still a possible way out. P.F. Duerksen was continuing to offer his Central Publishing Company in Hillsboro to the Conference. At first J.F. Harms was adamantly opposed to serving as editor if the *Zionsbote* were printed elsewhere. (He was also opposed to producing it as he had done heretofore.) But after further discussion and explanation Harms decided to cooperate for the sake of God and the Conference, and the delegation agreed it would be best to accept the Central Publishing Company offer.

The Publication Committee subsequently drew up a twelve-point agreement which stipulated that Harms was to

remain as editor of the *Zionsbote* as well as have general oversight over business affairs. It was also stipulated that the plant was to be relocated to Enid, Okla., about thirty-five miles south of Medford, where greater job work possibilities would help assure sufficient income for the business to carry itself financially. Each church was asked to try aggressively to raise the necessary funds to take over the Central Publishing Company within thirty days.

Business meetings were called throughout the churches regarding the Conference decision. Soon the results started coming in to the Conference chairman Abraham Schellenberg and to Editor Harms; clearly the churches were not in agreement with the Conference-adopted plan. They wanted to establish a new publishing house and were willing to contribute funds for that purpose!

Following this rejection of the Conference decision, several meetings of the Publication Committee were held in late 1903 and early 1904 to find a way to proceed toward a Conference publishing house. Of these, the apparently major meeting was held at Buhler, Kan., on January 15, 1904 with representatives from various churches and the Publication Committee. Among the business transacted was: (1) the ratification of the purchase of production rights and the subscription list of Sunday school leaflets from the Central Publishing Company for \$100; (2) the decision that the Conference publishing house be located at Medford, Okla., and (3) the decision that John J. Wall, John Harms, and J.F. Harms purchase a new press and whatever else would be necessary for the Conference printing plant. A total of \$933 had been contributed or pledged for the new plant. Churches which had not yet contributed were to be contacted. A giant step in Mennonite Brethren publications had been taken!

With everything looking up for the establishment of a Conference publishing house, J.F. Harms took this as his signal to buy a twenty-two by fifty-foot building along Medford's Main Street. Records do not show that the Conference bought or paid for this building, nor that it later received income from the sale of the building. Apparently Harms bought the building himself and made it available to the Conference.

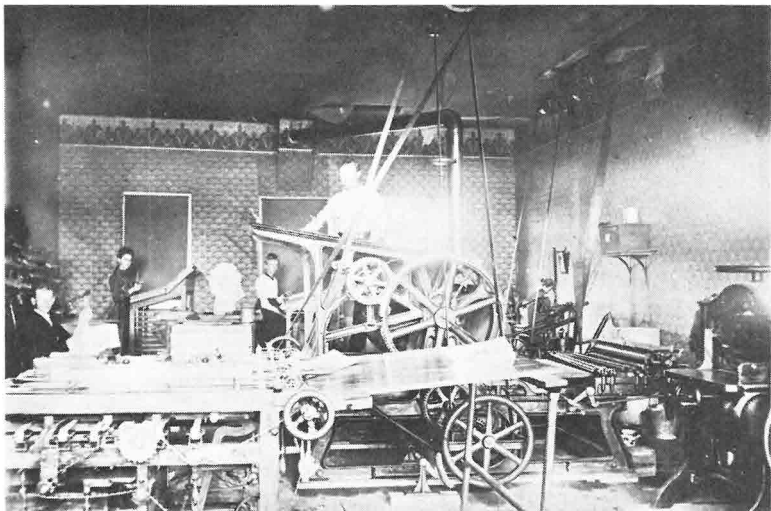
The pages of the *Zionsbote* of early 1904 reflected the ex-

citement of the birth of a Conference publishing house. The February 17 issue reported that all equipment for the new plant had been ordered and that the plant might be ready for operation in three or four weeks. It urged readers to send in their pledges. The March 30 issue announced that the Publication Committee would meet in Medford on April 7, the first day the *Zionsbote* would be printed on the new equipment. The resulting issue sparkled with fancy new division headings, a new masthead and crisp, clean type. The May 25 issue contained an entire page of pictures (zinc etchings) and descriptions of the new equipment: a thirty-two by forty-four-inch sheet-fed Babcock Reliance cylinder press (cost \$1,000), a Rockford folder (cost \$100), a Challenge paper cutter (cost \$185), a Morrison stitcher (cost \$125) and a Bates and Edmonds gasoline engine (cost \$120) to power all the machinery from a central overhead driveshaft. All equipment was hand fed. Subsequent issues contained many enthusiastic reader comments about the improved appearance of the *Zionsbote*. A giant step had been taken!

The excitement, hard work and responsibility had apparently been too much for J.F. Harms. In the *Zionsbote* of June 29 he served notice that his health had broken down, partly from a longstanding ailment, and that his doctor demanded a complete withdrawal from the *Zionsbote* for the time being, and perhaps for a long time. Three weeks later Harms reported in the *Zionsbote* that the Publication Committee had hired H.W. Lohrenz, a student at McPherson College who had recently been elected to the ministry by the Ebenfeld church near Hillsboro, as interim editor of the *Zionsbote*. He expressed elation at the choice. Subsequently Harms underwent surgery at Gotebo, Okla., where Dr. Peter Richert operated a hospital. By the time Lohrenz had to leave to continue his studies in McPherson, Harms was able to take up the work again.

The 1904 conference quickly disposed of the publication point of business by deciding that Harms continue as editor and that the Publication Committee regulate all other matters. The publishing house had been established and everything seemed to be on track.

At the 1905 conference Harms reported that someone had loaned the publishing house \$100 to order Bibles to begin a



The early Medford publishing house crew at work. Substitute editor H.W. Lohrenz is seated at the left.

Christian bookselling business. He urged others to follow this example. Harms was also put in charge of producing a periodical in the Russian language. Named *Golos* (Voice), the paper was to be edited by Hermann Fast of Saskatchewan. Its purpose was to strengthen the spiritual life of Russian-speaking Christians in the United States and Canada. It was produced until 1912 when it had to be discontinued because no Russian typesetter was available.

Since the Conference had taken over the publishing house, Harms was now an employee hired by the Conference. When the matter came up at the 1905 conference, he was hired by unanimous vote to serve as editor and manager of the publishing house with a salary of \$500 for one year.

This salary was more than Harms had received for twenty years of editing, publishing and printing the *Zionsbote*. Some years, if there was a treasury balance, the conference had voted a \$50 honorarium for him, some years \$25. A few years when the balance would not allow it, the money was voted from the evangelism treasury. Other years the matter was dropped or forgotten. During twenty years of service he had received a

total of \$400 in honorariums. But Harms made no demands, saying that he was making his living otherwise (meager as it usually was) and that he was doing this work as unto the Lord — for God and the Conference.

The End of an Era

Significant moves affecting Conference publication efforts were again made at the 1906 conference at Bingham Lake, Minn. At this conference J.F. Harms resigned his editorship and announced that he was on his way to Canada where Margaretha and three children had preceded him. Margaretha, who had long been suffering from increasingly excruciating headaches, had been advised by her physician to try a colder climate, Harms explained. The Conference was most reluctant to accept Harms's resignation and implored him to stay on until a successor could take over. Harms felt he could not commit himself to do this. After much evaluation and discussion regarding both an editor and the location of the publishing house, consideration focused on McPherson, Kan., as a location, particularly after the Kansas delegates felt that at least \$1,500 worth of job work could be anticipated there to help the publishing house financially. The motion to make this move carried unanimously.

A.L. Schellenberg, a teacher and farmer from the Buhler area, was discussed as an editorial possibility. He had already been contacted, but was not ready to commit himself, so the Publication Committee was commissioned to fill this vacancy.

In the *Zionsbote* of December 12, 1906, John Harms, chairman of the Publication Committee, reported that Schellenberg had accepted the position as editor and manager of the publishing house and that H.W. Lohrenz, while primarily interested in completing his education, was willing to serve as assistant editor until Schellenberg would be ready to take over. The *Zionsbote* also reported that a twenty-five by eighty-foot two-story brick building on McPherson's Main Street had been purchased for \$2,500 to house the operation.

Thus, as J.A. Toews in his *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* has noted, "an era that might justifiably be described as the 'Harms era' came to an end. With deliberate purpose and unswerving devotion Harms had promoted the

work of publications in the brotherhood for more than twenty years. . . . J.F. Harms was for Mennonite Brethren publications in America — its founder and father.”

J.F. Harms, however, was more than that. At Hillsboro he had served as church leader (pastor) for seven years. At Medford he served as minister and leader (pastor) of the small group of Mennonite Brethren meeting in a schoolhouse when he came. On November 12, 1899 the group organized as a church with about thirty members. In 1902 they bought a schoolhouse at auction and moved it to the center of the Mennonite Brethren settlement, three miles north of Medford. Total cost: \$133. Great joy prevailed when on January 23, 1903 this building was dedicated as the Mennonite Brethren Church of Medford with J.F. Harms speaking the dedicatory prayer. During the seven years Harms served the church as minister twenty-two believers were baptized at three baptismal services. Those who were among Harms's parishioners report that he was a good preacher and minister.

J.F. Harms was now on his way to Canada. His days as Mennonite Brethren editor and publisher were over. The publishing house was to be moved to McPherson, Kan., and new publication leadership was to take over. The “Harms Era” in publications had come to an end.

It seems almost incongruous that so shortly after achieving the hard-fought victory of founding a Conference publishing house, J.F. Harms would leave all and move on. Assuredly he was concerned about Margaretha's health and wanted to do what was best for her, but was that all? It seems that having won one victory, he needed new challenges in new settings for further conquests and new victories. Regardless, of the motivation behind this move, however, the fifty-one-year-old John F. Harms was not quitting or retiring. Undauntedly he was going on to new vistas and the beginning of a new chapter in his life.

PART THREE

New Challenges
in Canada

5

Itinerant Ministry to Russians and Germans

Western Canada was still largely an open frontier when J.F. Harms boarded the train after the 1906 conference in Minnesota. The regime of Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier (1896-1911), the first French-Canadian prime minister of Canada, was at its height. National prosperity was unparalleled with the value of Canadian exports jumping from \$116 million to \$290 million during Laurier's administration. Free western land was still available, and Sir Clifford Sifton, Laurier's Minister of the Interior, was encouraging immigration to fill the prairie lands.

Saskatchewan, where J.F. Harms hoped to settle on free land, had gained enough population by 1905 to become a province in the Dominion of Canada. From 1901 to 1911 its population increased from 91,279 to 492,432.

Among the settlers were Mennonite Brethren and other Mennonite farmers who had been attracted to Saskatchewan by free homesteads and cheap land as early as 1892. By 1905 three Mennonite Brethren churches had been organized in the Rosthern *Kreis* (district), twenty-five to fifty miles north of Saskatoon, and two churches had been organized in the Herbert *Kreis*, about 100 miles north of the U.S.-Canadian border or about 150 miles south of the Rosthern area. In this area J.F. Harms was to settle later. In addition to the organized churches, many small, unorganized groups were meeting and conducting church services in homes and schoolhouses.

From the conference in Minnesota Harms went to Edmonton, Alta., where Margaretha, daughters Tina and Susie, and youngest son Menno had preceded him and established residence. Very little information is extant about Harms's activities in Edmonton. A letter dated April 19, 1907 which ap-

peared in the *Zionsbote* reports that since they were not ready to settle far from town, and since the school and earning opportunities for young men in Edmonton were good, they would stay for a time.

Harms wrote that he was helping along in the German Baptist church, that the girls were active in Sunday school and the choir, and that opportunities for the work of the Lord were everywhere. But he makes no reference to the work among the Russians in Saskatchewan the 1906 conference had assigned to him for a remuneration of \$45, including traveling expenses. Nor does the yearbook of the next conference indicate whether Harms undertook this mission. There also is no indication that he was anxious to start farming as yet, though he planned to improve his financial condition by settling on a farm in Canada.

Ever since the founding of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia in 1860, which required conversion as basic to membership, Mennonite Brethren had strongly maintained their belief in a definite experience which would change the individual's lifestyle, habits and outlook to conform to the Bible as understood by Mennonite Brethren. This was often a traumatic experience. To help bring this about, it was the practice to have visiting ministers conduct numerous special evening services at which the claims of Christ were presented and opportunities were given for individuals to get right with God. The first step was a deep sorrow for sins of the past and prayer and more prayer for forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ. Once the individual "prayed through" and experienced this forgiveness he or she was considered "born again" to live in "newness of life." During the day, the minister would visit the homes of the community for special counseling about spiritual problems and to urge those who had not experienced the "new birth" to take this step. In many cases ministers of one church would be assigned by the conference to serve as evangelists in other churches. While ministering at the Medford, Okla., church, Harms had also served other churches in Oklahoma in this manner. In some cases ministers devoted their full time to conducting itinerant evangelistic services. Usually these meetings were held when farm work in the rural communities was not too pressing. Wayward Christians in the community

were also contacted in an effort to bring them back to a right relationship with God, other people and the church.

At the 1907 conference at Dalmeny, Sask. (Rosthern district), Harms served as assistant secretary. This conference assigned him to a year's itinerant ministry as described above in the German Mennonite Brethren and Russian circles of Saskatchewan and North Dakota. At the 1908 conference at Fairview, Okla., Harms was not present but was assigned a half year's itinerant ministry among the Russians of Saskatchewan and North Dakota. Hermann Fast, the editor of *Golos*, the leaflet produced by the Mennonite Brethren Conference for the Russian Christians, was to accompany Harms for three months. Fast was also the self-appointed missionary to the Doukhobors, living, teaching school and farming among them at Petrofka, northwest of Saskatoon, and leading a small Mennonite Brethren church there. Of these itinerant ministries Harms kept detailed diaries.

The Doukhobors

The Doukhobors, an offshoot of the Russian Orthodox Church, were a sect deriving their doctrines from a number of sources, including heterodox Protestantism, Freemasonry and Khlysty teaching. The sect arose in the village of Okhochee and in the province of Kharkov in the Russian Ukraine about 1755. In 1785 they received their name (meaning "Spirit wrestlers") from the Archbishop of Ekaterinoslav. In 1802 they were deported to the province of Taurida in the southern part of the Ukraine, adjoining the area where the Molotschna settlement was begun in 1804. Here the Doukhobors adopted a communal and semi-communistic lifestyle.

Doctrinally the Doukhobors rejected the Orthodox church, priests, sacraments (including baptism and marriage) and ikons and sought to restore the simplicity of worship of the early church. In seeking simplicity of worship and in being pacifists and refusing induction into military service, they were similar to Mennonites. In other matters of doctrine and practice, they were poles apart.

The Doukhobors did not believe in original sin and perceived God as the Soul of the World, living in the human heart, teaching wisdom and giving happiness. Thus they sought inner

inspiration which had to come from direct revelation. To them God did not exist alone but was inseparable from the righteous who gave him life. Jesus Christ, God's son, was the embodied spirit of piety and virtue and was regularly reincarnated as the current leader of the Doukhobors. The soul, they maintained, was not a part of the body at birth but developed gradually during childhood and adolescence. It was shaped by the memory and reason of the "Living Book," a body of tradition believed to derive from Christ and expressed in a large number of hymns, meditations, precepts and commentaries.

In Russia the Doukhobors had repeatedly been persecuted and expelled from their villages until, through the intervention of Count Tolstoy and the British Quakers, some 8,000 of them were allowed to come to Saskatchewan in 1898-99. Some of these settled in eleven villages north of the North Saskatchewan River northwest of Saskatoon. The Mennonites, including Mennonite Brethren, settled south of the North Saskatchewan River. A similar situation had existed in Russia where the Doukhobors had lived on the west side of the Molotschnaya River while the Mennonites had settled on the east side. Mennonite Brethren felt that this proximity was providential and constituted a spiritual and evangelistic responsibility both in Russia and in Canada. As already mentioned, Hermann Fast, who worked with J.F. Harms in ministering to the Russians in Saskatchewan and North Dakota part of the time, was the foremost Mennonite Brethren spiritual worker among the Doukhobors. J.F. Harms, though working among the Russians, including Doukhobors, reports only one ministerial contact with them when on December 4, 1908 he conducted a Bible study at Petrofka. He was impressed by the deep spiritual faith of these people. Apparently because of the good work Fast was doing among the Doukhobors, Harms was concentrating his efforts more on the "Little Russians."

Ministering to the Little Russians

The Little Russians came from a region consisting mainly of the Ukraine in southwest Russia known as Little Russia. They had emigrated to Saskatchewan primarily from the province of Kharkov during the first years of the twentieth cen-

tury under conditions of extreme poverty and had settled in the vicinity of the Eagle Creek, west of Saskatoon.

The Little Russians also had learned to know the Mennonite Brethren in Russia. A goodly number of them had come to faith through Mennonite Brethren witnesses and thus considered themselves Mennonite Brethren although they had no formal affiliation with them. For this reason the Mennonite Brethren Conference felt a special responsibility to minister to these former compatriots by sending J.F. Harms to them.

About the same time these Little Russians came to the Eagle Creek, several hundred more families from the Kiev province of the Ukraine came to the United States and settled on government land in North Dakota. A number of these, too, had come to faith through the Mennonite Brethren in Russia and considered themselves Mennonite Brethren, although they too had no formal affiliation with them. Thus they were also included in J.F. Harms's itinerant ministry.

After working for several weeks among the German-speaking Mennonite Brethren immediately after the 1907 conference, one of the brethren took J.F. Harms to the Little Russians at the Eagle Creek, about thirty-five to forty miles south, to begin his conference-assigned work on November 30, 1907. Margaretha, her health much improved by the move to Canada, had left immediately after the conference for their home in Edmonton.

In spite of extremely cold weather, blowing snow and frigid winds Harms conducted services, preached in various homes and made house visitations where he did much spiritual counseling. He also conducted music instruction sessions with rooms full of young people eager to learn to read notes. In connection with these sessions he conducted devotionals. He examined candidates, performed baptisms and conducted church business meetings.

The problems these people faced were legion. Although many were sincere and well-meaning Christians, church leadership and organization were very weak. Most of the people had only a minimal education and lacked knowledge of procedure as well as of the Scriptures. This resulted in very weak teaching and preaching and great spiritual immaturity. As a result there was much disagreement and infighting. This

also made them very vulnerable to any devious teaching which might come along. To help them overcome these problems was J.F. Harms's assignment.

Personal problems were also many. There was discord among neighbors and among professing Christians. Marital problems wrenched many homes. In one case a woman had been married and divorced in Russia and had married her present husband without revealing her past to him. He was a Sunday school teacher and when people became aware of the situation, it became very difficult for him to teach. In working with the case it came to light that the former husband had died long ago, thus not making her present marriage unscriptural.

During his house visitations Harms came upon a man who had been raised in Poland, had been a revolutionary and subsequently had joined the navy. In New York he had adopted a boy, and three years prior to Harms's visit had married a Molokan widow with four children. Now he and his adopted son were living on adjoining farms in the Eagle Creek community. His marriage to the widow had been a happy one, but she had died recently. What made her husband especially distraught was that although she had become a Christian earlier, she had not been baptized because of strife in the church. Harms tried to point the weeping husband to Christ, and praise God, he found peace. Now he and his adopted son were both asking for baptism. A little later his stepdaughter walked eight miles to tell Harms that she too had been saved.

Another man, who seemed to be at odds with everybody, was accused of stealing a *Pelz* (fur coat). He maintained that the owner had given it to him before his death. After a long time of counseling, the man finally softened and agreed to be reconciled with his accuser.

A woman who had backslidden returned to Christ with weeping and prayer. Again and again prayers, confessions and weeping would interrupt Harms's preaching. It is no wonder that Harms decided to continue his needed ministry here rather than go home for the 1907 Christmas holidays.

Despite the extreme December cold, Harms officiated at three outdoor baptisms among the Russians. Each time a hole had been chopped through the ice so that baptism by immersion could be performed. At each occasion the baptismal ser-

mon was preached in the respective home, then in borrowed overalls and jacket Harms would step into the hole in the ice and perform the baptism, the splashing water freezing his beard into ice. A borrowed fur coat would be thrown over him as he ran into the house to change his clothes. Thereafter the reception of new members and communion would be observed in the home. Harms reported that he had not been cold on these occasions. In fact, he said, such cold baths might be beneficial for one's health.

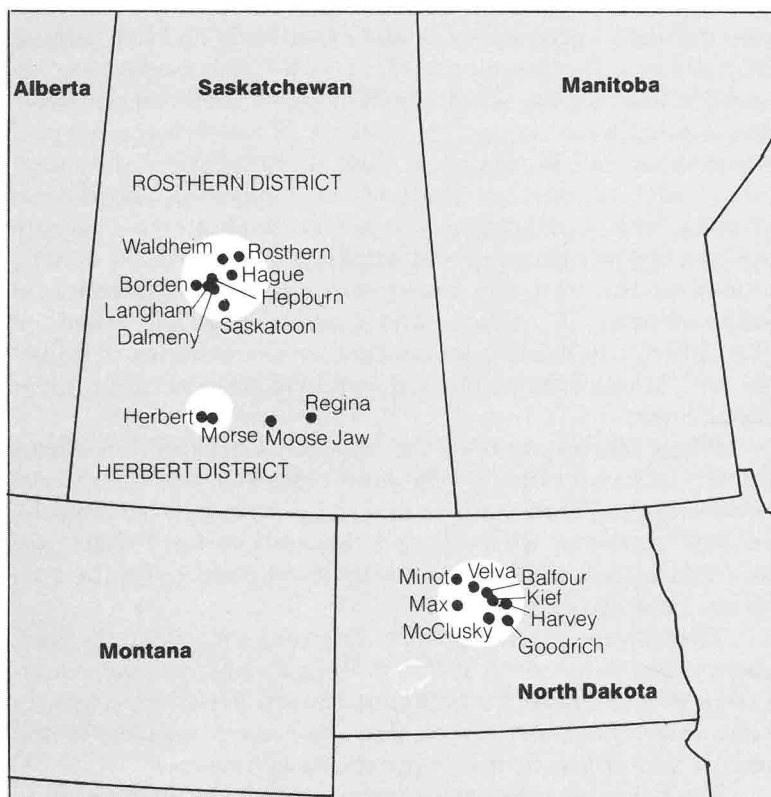
When Harms returned to the Eagle Creek Russians about six months later he found that his audiences were much smaller. The reason? Many of those counting themselves as the church had defected to the Seventh-Day Adventists. Also some who were of Baptist leanings and orientation had left because they did not like the name "Mennonite" or because they objected to footwashing which the Mennonite Brethren practiced. To them, footwashing implied legalism. When Harms conducted communion and footwashing, they would abstain and ominously watch the service. Many of these, however, also did not go along with the Baptists because they did not take a definite position against smoking and drinking. Such were the chaotic situations Harms faced among these Russian Christians in Saskatchewan. A victory was gained, however, when on November 1, 1908 Luka Kravtschenko was ordained as minister and Michael Rebuscha was ordained as deacon by Elder David Dyck.

When Harms went to the Russian Christians in North Dakota he found virtually the same situation. Attrition to the Adventists had been massive and many were still battling the Sabbath question. Quarrels and demands to have their own way and a lack of Christian maturity seemed to be the rule rather than the exception.

There were, however, also spiritual victories. At Max, about thirty miles south of Minot, Harms conducted the examination of candidates for baptism. Toward evening everybody went from the home where they had been meeting to the nearby lake. Here Harms baptized ten believers.

The next day a church business meeting was held to decide on the location of a church building. Four sites were under consideration, and for two years the people had fought about

the matter without being able to come to consensus. At this meeting the people again began to quarrel and nothing could be accomplished. Finally Harms disbanded the session and asked the people to meet again the next day. The next day consensus was finally reached, though some refused to cooperate. Also at this meeting individual pledges totaling \$600 were made to pay for the new church building. Although he had planned to leave, J.F. Harms stayed several days longer while the brethren put a fence around the one-acre church plot. Dedication of the new church building was set for August 9, 1908 and J.F. was to be back for the occasion. As it turned out, he



The Harvey and McClusky area of North Dakota and the Rosthern and Herbert districts of Saskatchewan.

found it impossible to come, but the dedication proceeded as planned.

At another time Harms and Fast came to Kief, about forty miles east of Max, by train. Four Russians were waiting for them at the station. They poured out their hearts to Harms. They were on their way to court in connection with a case that had been dragging on for a year and had already cost one of them \$1,000. This brother had witnessed against the son of a neighbor who had taken up a land claim without being of age. The neighbor and his sons swore revenge. Soon ten of the brother's horses drowned and another four of his best horses died. The brother had witnesses to what had been done and so the neighbor and his son were sentenced to one year in prison. Then the brother sued his neighbor in an effort to recover his financial loss. The church next excommunicated him for going to court, and all this brought him to physical and spiritual ruin. On top of all this, the wife of the convicted man sued the brother, wrongly accusing him of being the father of her illegitimate child. This was Harms's reception among the Russians at Kief! All he could do, he reported, was point these men to Christ, who can still all storms.

Here at Kief the people had requested Bible studies on the Second Coming of Christ. Harms obliged with afternoon and evening sessions. The interest in the subject was so intense that for more than a week Harms never got to bed before one o'clock in the morning.

Coming back to Max, a meeting was held with four Russian churches who were considering joining the Mennonite Brethren Conference. Meeting in the new Max church, Harms and Fast spent until past midnight explaining Mennonite Brethren positions on missions, ministers and elders, foot-washing, the oath, nonresistance, marriage with unbelievers, charging of interest and the use of tobacco and alcoholic beverages. While Harms and Fast left the room, the Russians voted as to whether they wanted to join the Mennonite Brethren Conference. The result: half said yes, the other half said no because they objected to nonresistance.

Despite many difficulties, Harms continued conducting services in churches, homes and schoolhouses. During the day he would make house visitations; on evenings when there were

no services, he frequently conducted sessions to teach young people to sing by notes. In addition to all this, he kept trying to sell subscriptions to *Golos*.

Ministering to the Germans

Between his stints of working among the Russians, Harms ministered to the German-speaking Mennonite Brethren people in the Rosthern district, in the Harvey and McClusky areas of North Dakota, and in the Herbert district of Saskatchewan.

Although most of the Germans had a better spiritual background and had been taught the Scriptures, Harms lamented the sad spiritual condition of many. He found many cases where husbands were out of fellowship with the church while the wives were still trying to remain true to their faith. In many areas spiritual leadership and preaching were very weak and the Sunday school was nonexistent, especially in the small groups meeting in homes or schoolhouses. There were few trained ministers. Most were uneducated ministers who farmed for a living. Some of the larger groups had constructed church buildings, had stronger spiritual leadership and even conducted Sunday school. Yet of one leading church which had constructed a building in 1901 and had established a Sunday school at the same time, Harms lamented that the spiritual condition of its young people was very sad. He wrote in his diary that similar conditions existed in other churches. Some young people refused even to greet Harms. Others refused to say anything when he tried to speak to them about spiritual matters. Few came to family devotions.

Various factors worsened the situation. One was that the entire family had to be totally involved in overcoming the hardships and hard work of pioneering, with long hours of backbreaking work. This took all their time and energy, leaving little or none for spiritual nurture. The great distances between them allowed for little personal fellowship or interaction.

"They used their children as work machines, the parents became materialistic and the children godless," Harms wrote in his diary. People blamed the cold climate for discouraging education and church attendance, thus creating extreme lone-

liness and the sad spiritual condition among their youth. Many believed that no orderly upbringing of youth was possible in this climate and that they should move to a warmer region. Harms disagreed. A major reason for the negative attitude of the young people was the disagreement and lack of fellowship among the members of the churches. This, he felt, caused many young people to turn away from the church and from Christ.

Harms began his ministry among the German-speaking Mennonite Brethren in the Rosthern district by going from place to place: Aberdeen — where he conducted a total of three weeks of meetings, assisted in dedicating a church building, and baptized three; Langham — where he held five services and made fourteen house visitations; Ebenfeld (Level Field) — where he held a total of three weeks of meetings and made twenty-one house visits; Neu-Hoffnug (New Hope) — where five meetings were to have closed the series, but so many prayed and wept for forgiveness of their sins that the meetings were extended for another day. And thus it went throughout the Saskatchewan communities. Clearly, God was there!

In North Dakota similar meetings were held in Harvey — where J.F. Harms brought the communion sermon after eighteen had been baptized; McClusky — where Harms and Fast were each given a new black suit and a *Pelz* (fur coat) by the church; Goodrich — where three young men were baptized; Greatstone, Martin and Johannestal. God was here also!

And he was also in services in the Herbert district — at Bethel, Herbert — where forty-six from Herbert and surrounding areas were baptized with Harms giving the baptismal sermon. He was in meetings in schoolhouses at Turnhill, Lobethal, Rush Lake and Gnadenau. Many were baptized as a result of evangelistic meetings conducted by evangelist Frank J. Wiens.

On July 17, 1909 Harms came home and wrote in his diary, "Herewith my Conference work . . . is completed." This marked the end of his itinerant ministry.

It had not been easy. Sometimes he had felt as if he couldn't go on, but God had always given grace and strength. One time when he had walked twelve miles, he wrote in his diary, "Very tired." Adding to the difficulties of Harms's ministry were the pioneer primitiveness, cultural differences and

poverty under which many of the people lived. Often Harms would sleep in a different bed at a different place night after night. Frequently there was no extra bed, so he shared a bed with the head of the house whose wife would sleep on a couch or on the floor. Once three men slept crosswise on one bed with chairs at the side for their feet. Harms reported in his diary that despite the inconvenience he had slept well that night.

Occasionally the lack of sanitation posed a problem. At one place Harms found a calf surrounded by manure, repulsive odors and all, in the kitchen. He asked why they housed the calf here. The answer was simple: they didn't have room in the barn. Harms found it difficult to swallow his food at this place.

Harms also found that some parents did not teach their children to undress before going to bed. They slept in clothes and shoes encrusted with mud and manure. Harms found it difficult to sleep in beds like this that had not been changed for months. Some of his nights were also made miserable by the live companionship of bedbugs. At times his health also created problems for him. Yet through it all he kept on, day after day, rarely missing an appointment, carrying out the ministry which God and the Conference had entrusted to him.

Although we have no manuscripts or notes of sermons J.F. Harms preached during his itinerant ministries in Saskatchewan and North Dakota, the titles of sermons as given in his diary indicate that many of them were apparently evangelistic in accordance with his assignment. Among the titles were: "The Prodigal Son," "Weighed and Found Wanting," "Jesus and Barabbas," "The Savior on the Cross," "How Shall We Escape, if We Neglect so Great Salvation," "Felix and Drusilla," and "Be Ye Reconciled to God." From Harms's personality and other writings we can conclude, however, that he was not over-emotional in his evangelism, nor did he overemphasize salvation to the disparagement of service and helping the needy. His was not a flamboyant or sensational ministry, but rather a solid preaching of the Scriptures as a result of which many people found salvation and help for their problems.

6

Homesteader, Minister and Educator

Harms seemed to be in no hurry to homestead a place and start farming. But needing to be pragmatic about making a living, he kept eyes and ears open for any opportunities which might come his way.

When he was itinerating among the Little Russians at the Eagle Creek some of the brethren spoke of a section of land which reportedly was one of the best in the area and which was still available for homesteading. Harms pricked up his ears! When they showed the land to him, he liked what he saw and decided to file for it, even though he could not inspect the land very well since it was heavily blanketed with snow.

Harms took the train to Battleford and filed for one quarter section of this land for himself and made arrangements to have his sons Sam and Menno each take a quarter, and his son-in-law Sam Hodel take the fourth quarter. What a farming layout this would make!

April 7 (1908) was to be the beginning of six weeks of vacation from his itinerant preaching. Harms was planning to help Menno, almost eighteen, and Sam Hodel, who had arrived in the area, get started to build a sixteen by forty-foot house and other necessities on the homestead. The Eagle Creek brethren had promised to help with the building and to take care of plowing and seeding the land.

Back in the German Mennonite Brethren communities of Saskatchewan, Harms purchased two yoke of oxen and a wagon from church people. After spending the Easter holidays with the German-speaking people in the Rosthern district, they hitched two oxen to the wagon and with the other two following behind, they began loading the wagon and heading toward the homestead, stopping for meals and nights at the

farm homes of church people where Harms was known and loved. En route they purchased a plow, a cookstove, a grindstone, spade, shovels and groceries. People donated flour, potatoes, chickens, roosters, hams, eggs, meat and many other things till the wagon was so overloaded that the oxen were barely able to pull it. But on they went with Sam Hodel leading the oxen, sloshing knee-deep through mud, slush and water. They arrived at the Eagle Creek settlement on the evening of April 22, grateful to God for a safe trip.

Extreme disappointment, however, greeted them the next day when they inspected the homestead. Harms's quarter looked good. About twenty-five acres of Hodel's quarter was very rocky, and Menno's had marshy land all around it. Menno and Hodel did not want their land. J.F., who had seen this land only under deep snow, felt completely defeated. That night he wrote in his diary: "Why did this have to happen to me? I don't know, but I am beginning to believe that I am unable to assess anything temporal and will have to bury my hopes for a more prosperous earthly life."

The men decided to drop their claims and return home.

The next morning they began disposing of part of their load and started back the same way they had come. As they stopped at farms of the Russians, many wept when they heard what had happened. J.F. Harms wrote in his diary that he was unspeakably sad.

Coming back to the Mennonite Brethren communities, they gave away more things, shipped some to Edmonton, and sold the oxen. The man who had sold the wagon to them generously took it back. Hodel and Menno took the train back to Edmonton. To help allay their disappointment, J.F. paid for their tickets. After more visits to churches and homes in the area, J.F. also returned to Edmonton for about a week of rest before continuing his itinerant ministry in the Rosthern district and in North Dakota.

While ministering at Harvey, N.D., Harms heard the brethren speak favorably of homesteading possibilities south of Herbert, Sask. Later, while ministering in the Herbert district, he preached in a service held at the Jacob Prieb home about fifteen miles southeast of Morse and also stayed at the Prieb home for the night. The next morning Prieb told Harms

that he and his wife had come to a decision that night. Adjoining his and his sons' farms was some land for which they had planned to file, but if Harms was interested, they would make it available for him and his family. He was interested!

On August 3, 1908 J.F. Harms and Sam Hodel, after inspecting the land and liking it, took the train to Moose Jaw and filed for one quarter each for J.F., Menno, Sam Harms and Sam Hodel. Later they also filed for another quarter of Preemption land for each of the four.

When Harms returned to Herbert on March 22, 1909 after another stint of itinerant preaching, the settlement of the homestead began humming. In Herbert he bought a house for \$125 which they raised onto four wagons. With a string of oxen pulling the house-on-wagons they proceeded to the Harms homestead. By evening the house stood on its rock foundation. The next day they returned the movers' planks to Herbert and brought back lumber to build a pigpen and barn for the piglet the Priebs had given them. J.F. next bought a cow for \$30. Soon they would be self-sufficient farmers.

Prairie living had its share of hazards and excitement. One day J.F. had gone to Morse with his wagon and oxen. On the way home he noticed something unusual to the south. Soon he realized it was a prairie fire stretching over a large front. As he saw the orange flames bobbing up and down, he was gripped by extreme fear, but kept going. Fortunately the fire always stayed about half a mile from him.

When he arrived home he found everyone quivering with excitement. They had had to fight the fire with every ounce of strength, and had it not been for the Priebs and the Jost brothers, who had come to help, they might have lost everything. Around the Harms place everything was burned black. God had, however, been good to them, thanks to their helpful neighbors.

The homestead was to become a real home when "Ma" (Mrs. John F. Harms) arrived on April 30. She had gone from Edmonton to visit Tina and Susie, who were teaching in the Rosthern area, and was now moving to the homestead to live with her husband and family.

Soon the Harms place was a beehive of activity. Rocks were being crushed to hard-surface walks around the place,

shelves were built for the house and other improvements made, a hog was butchered, and J.F. helped Ma make a garden.

About the time Harms completed his itinerant ministry the public school district in which they resided had been organized. As a result, a roomy schoolhouse was built near the Prieb farm in 1910 and church services were moved from private homes to the schoolhouse. Here the Gnadenau Mennonite Brethren Church was organized in 1910 with thirty-eight members and with J.F. Harms as leader and minister. Soon the membership rose to fifty and the schoolhouse was becoming crowded. In 1913 the congregation, with Harms still as leader, built a larger church building in a central location in the Mennonite Brethren settlement. In 1916 a rural postoffice, named Flowing Well, was established about one-half mile from the Harms' farm. Thus the address of the Harmses and the church became Flowing Well, Sask.

Although John F. Harms was now settled on a farm, evidence that he did much farm work is scarce. Preaching, teaching and writing were much more his forte. Thus for several years he offered one-month Bible study courses in the churches during the winter months. During the winter of 1911-12 he conducted what he called a "migrant Bible school" in the churches of the Rosthern district. Through these efforts people in the church were becoming more and more aware of the need for Bible school training for their young people.

The Herbert Bible School

The Northern District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church had its beginning in 1910 and consisted of the Rosthern and Herbert areas. In 1913 Manitoba joined as another area. At the second conference of the Northern District in 1911 the delegation recognized the need for a German school to give Bible instruction to their youth. A committee of nine men was appointed to study the possibilities. J.F. Harms, who served as secretary of the first four conferences, was a member of this committee and became its prime moving force.

At the 1912 conference the committee recommended that two Bible schools be established — one in the Rosthern area and one in the Herbert area. At the same time the recommendation urged proceeding to build a school at Herbert because

the Herbert promoters had what they considered to be a fool-proof plan. With an initial outlay of \$1,500 they would buy thirty acres of land one mile west of town. Five acres would be reserved for a campus and the rest would be subdivided into lots to sell at \$100 each. The returns from this subdivision would pay for building and furnishing the school. To operate the school at literally no cost to the Conference or the students, ten businessmen would loan \$300 each to the Conference to buy a section of land. The first two crop years were to repay the loans. After that the money would flow into the school treasury to take care of teachers' salaries and all other expenses.

A vigorous discussion followed the recommendation, but the decision to have each district establish its own school was sustained. This left the Herbert enthusiasts at liberty to go ahead with their plan which looked so easy and foolproof — on paper. But the golden dream did not become reality; the lots did not sell. Saskatchewan was entering a cycle of drouth and economic stagnation.

Nevertheless, in the summer of 1913 the Herbert Bible School began to approach reality. A basement was dug on the campus one mile west of town, and a vacant public schoolhouse was bought from the village of Herbert and moved onto it. The basement was made twice the size of the building to allow for further expansion. With Harms as the administrator, only teacher and everything else, the Herbert Bible School opened for its first four-month term that fall. Thus the first Mennonite Brethren educational institution in Canada was born.

The school year began with fourteen students — five young women and nine young men. Conditions were unbelievably primitive. Margaret Epp in *Proclaim Jubilee*, a history of the Mennonite Brethren Bible school movement in western Canada, tells of boys sleeping on tables or under tables, girls rooming in an unheated attic with snow sifting down on them, and the fifty-eight-year-old Harms occupying a tiny six by six-foot cell, also unheated. Harms, however, was so thoroughly convinced of the importance of a Bible school education that he made personal, secret and interest-free loans to four students out of his meager funds so they could return to school the following year.

Harms also felt that although the Bible school was conducted in German, it had an obligation to evangelize its English-speaking neighbors. In this regard he was considerably ahead of his time. Most Mennonites of that era were more concerned with maintaining their ethnic way of life, insulated by the German language, than with reaching out to their English-speaking neighbors with the gospel. To meet this obligation Harms conducted weeknight meetings in the Herbert town hall. Speaking of the students going to these meetings, Margaret Epp says, "They walked, two by two the mile to town, strung out behind their trailblazer, Teacher Harms. His straggly beard (Harms was known in Herbert as 'the man with the beard') waving in the wintry wind, a lantern slung on a stick across his shoulders — this is the way his students remember him to this day. They stepped where he stepped, guided by the bobbing light. In many ways that count, they are still following his footsteps, living out his teaching. . . . When 'the man with the beard' lit the lantern and led his band of students down the snowy mile, did he have any idea what he was starting?"

No, he did not. By the time the Herbert Bible School closed its doors forty-four years later, well over 1,000 had been enrolled in its courses. And many of these had gone on to serve as ministers, missionaries, teachers, Sunday school and church workers throughout the world.



Artist Lorlie Barkman's rendition of Teacher Harms and students on the way to a weeknight meeting. (From Margaret Epp's *Proclaim Jubilee*)

As had been the case when Harms produced the *Zionsbote*, monetary shortages plagued the school from its inception. At the 1914 conference Harms was given a free hand to seek support and to awaken interest for the school throughout the Northern Conference. But the money did not come rolling in. At the 1916 conference Harms reported that the school had gone through difficult times and that two other Mennonite denominations — the Sommerfelder and the General Conference Mennonites — had been invited to join the Mennonite Brethren in sponsoring the school. At the 1918 conference Harms reported that the Association of the Mennonite Bible School at Herbert had been formed with the two other groups, that all property had been signed over to the association, and that the Conference was no longer responsible for the school. Yet he emphatically urged the delegation to continue to support it in every way.

During this period of his life only one example of literary effort by Harms has come down to us in the form of a manuscript, dated 1917. This manuscript has the double title: "*Biblische Zwiegespraeche zur erbaulichen Lektuern*" (Biblical Dialogues for Devotional Reading) and "*Biblische Geschichten im pontischen Gewande*" (Biblical Stories in Attractive Garb) by J.F. Harms, Preacher of the Gospel. To the first title he added the notation "but under no circumstances for dramatic production," showing Harms's aversion to anything that might smack of the theater. The manuscript is in poetic form and contains twelve dialogues, the titles of which translate as follows: The First Family, The Flood, Building the Tower of Babel, Abram and Abraham, Abraham as Peacemaker, Abraham Rescues Lot, Sodom's Destruction, Joys and Sufferings in Abraham's Family, Abraham Offers Isaac, Isaac's Marriage, Isaac's Wanderings and Problems, Jacob's Flight to Haran and His Experiences with Laban.

The obvious aim of the writing was to increase biblical knowledge by putting it into a more interesting and palatable form. It also shows us Harms's interest in Bible teaching during this time of his life as well as his literary versatility.

Leaving Canada

Harms was facing another change in his life. He was sixty-

three years old; the Bible school had been placed on a different track; his son Menno, not wanting to be a farmer, had gotten a business job in Edmonton; the leadership of the Gnadenau Mennonite Brethren church, which Harms resigned when his involvement with the Herbert Bible School took him away from the church most of the time, had been given to Sam Hodel; and actual involvement in farming had never appealed to him. Considering all these factors, Harms decided to leave the farm, which he sold to son-in-law Sam Hodel, and together with Ma left for Seattle, Wash., in 1918.

Why Seattle, of all places? Ma Harms still longed to visit her brothers and sisters in Russia. When World War 1 broke out her dream had to be shelved, but by 1918 the war seemed to be winding down. The Harmses went to Seattle, hoping to be ready to take a ship from there to Vladivostok and from there go overland to Siberia, where three members of her family were now living.

In Seattle Harms again found useful work for God and humankind. He was active in forwarding relief clothing to the needy people in Siberia. In 1919 M.B. Fast of Reedley, Calif., came to Seattle to accompany a relief clothing shipment to Russia. Here Fast and Harms packed and readied fifty-one chests of clothing (Fast had received permission to send a total of 250 chests of clothing). Then Fast left via Vladivostok to distribute the clothing to the neediest in Siberia. When he returned to Vladivostok on the way home, Fast found that in his absence Harms had sent another eighty-seven chests of clothing which were waiting in Vladivostok. These clothes were assigned to the Red Cross for distribution.

The Harmses' trip to Siberia was not to be. In 1919, before it was possible for them to go, Ma's health began to deteriorate. Thinking that a visit to their children might help, J.F. and Ma took the train to Edmonton. But her condition worsened and Ma had to enter a hospital in Edmonton. Exploratory surgery revealed that she was suffering from stomach cancer, which was too far advanced for further surgery or any hopes for recovery.

When Ma was released from the hospital two weeks later she and J.F. took the train to California, hoping the warmer climate would ameliorate her suffering.

Another chapter — the Canada chapter of their lives — had come to a close as the train chugged away toward California.

PART FOUR

Final
Challenges in
Kansas

7

Continuing to Serve

After the close of World War 1 the United States entered a new period of history and development. J.F. Harms was also entering a new period of his life. At first it was a period of activity and development, but more and more it became one of denouement and conclusion.

The first activity for J.F. and Margaretha Harms in California was to seek help for Margaretha's illness. They went to Pasadena where a faith healer, Dr. Yokum, prayed over Margaretha. J.F. wrote shortly thereafter that Ma had been healed through prayer and that she was eating and sleeping well and gaining strength daily.

With things looking up, the Harmses bought a house in Reedley, Calif., near the Mennonite Brethren church, and J.F. announced that he had been appointed West Coast representative of the Mennonite Brethren Publishing House. His assignment was to visit the West Coast Mennonite Brethren churches with authorization to accept payments and orders for the publishing house.

After about six encouraging months of improving health for Ma, deterioration again set in. By February of 1921 she was bedfast. It became obvious that her illness was terminal, but Ma had one more wish — to die in Hillsboro, Kan.

Thus Ma began her last earthly train trip in April. Lying in a Pullman bed the entire way, she apparently tolerated the trip very well. "It seemed as if God was bearing us up in his strong arms," J.F. wrote later. On April 16 they arrived in Hillsboro where she entered Salem Hospital. Four weeks later, on May 15, while slumbering softly, she passed from this life at the age of sixty-six years. The funeral service was conducted on May 17 in the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church. Burial

was in the church cemetery where a small white marble marker, to be matched by her husband's beside hers twenty-four years later, was erected.

* * *

The sixty-six-year-old John F. Harms had outlived two wives, but before long he was ready to take on another. On November 30, a little more than six months after Margaretha died, he was married to Adelgunda ("Gunda") Jost Prieb, a widow whose husband William Prieb had died about three weeks before Margaretha. The wedding was held in the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church with P.C. Hiebert officiating.

Harms's favorite step-daughter-in-law of the Prieb family relates that during his engagement to Gunda, Harms was extremely happy at the prospect of having a normal home again. When the Prieb's had invited the engaged couple to their home for dinner, Harms had acted like a young fellow. A lover of singing, he had children and adults join in hearty singing of the German song, *Liebe wie gross, O Liebe wie gross* (Love How Great, O Love How Great).

Soon Harms acquired a Model T Ford. Having learned to drive a car only in his later years, he drove without slowing down for corners or dips, much to the trepidation of pedestrians, other motorists and his passengers, especially Gunda. Nevertheless, he and Gunda made a trip to visit her children in Oklahoma without incident other than frayed nerves, according to the step-daughter-in-law.

Serving at the Publishing House

When Harms returned to Hillsboro from California to comply with the deathbed wish of Margaretha, he did not know what the future would hold for him. In retrospect it seems providential that Margaretha wanted to die in Hillsboro. It was here that J.F. had formerly done his publishing of the *Zionsbote* and was known as Editor Harms; it was here that the Mennonite Brethren Publishing House was now located; and it was here that part-time editorial and other work was waiting for him.

Harms stepped in to meet these needs when J.D. Fast, who had become editor of the *Zionsbote* and manager of the

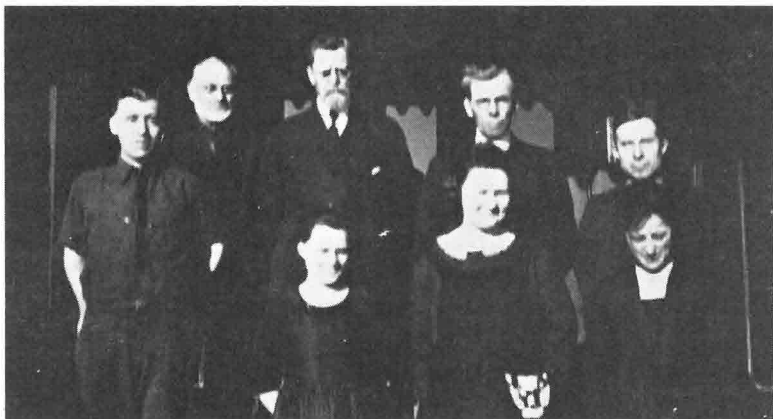
publishing house in 1919, went to Oklahoma with his car loaded with books and Bibles which he hoped to sell in the churches. Harms was thus back at the publishing house which he had helped found seventeen years earlier. Here he continued to serve God and the Conference for some thirteen more years.

In the June 3, 1921 issue of the *Hillsboro Vorwaerts* (Forward), a German local weekly paper which the publishing house had purchased when it was moved from McPherson to Hillsboro in 1913, Harms began writing a column "*Dies und das; fuer jeden was*" (This and That; Something for Everyone) under the initials "J.F.H." The column was a potpourri of national and international news and interest items. In the column Harms also reported requests for relief contributions for the needy in Russia.

About a year later Harms's involvement in publications increased dramatically when he served as interim editor of the *Zionsbote* after J.D. Fast resigned the editorship and terminated his connection with the publishing house without warning on June 17, 1922. Harms also continued his work on the *Hillsboro Vorwaerts*.

Considerable sentiment soon expressed itself in the Mennonite Brethren constituency that A.L. Schellenberg, the former editor and manager who had succeeded Harms in 1906, be asked to assume this post again. In September Schellenberg consented to return to Hillsboro from his farm at Littlefield, Tex., as soon as he could make arrangements. After a transition period of a number of months, Schellenberg took over as manager of the publishing house and as editor of the *Zionsbote* and *Vorwaerts*. Harms continued as assistant editor and columnist and in 1923 began to write the weekly Sunday school lesson expositions in the *Zionsbote*. In 1924 he began a column entitled "*Verschiedenes*" (Miscellanea) in the *Zionsbote*.

Harms's editorial load on the *Zionsbote* was to become still heavier when beginning July 10, 1928 he began writing the editorial column "*Aus eurer Werkstube*" (From Your Workroom) and making editorial comments and suggestions. The reason? Schellenberg was off to Dalhart, Tex., to begin another Mennonite land settlement and came to Hillsboro only occasionally, leaving the editorial work to the seventy-three-year-

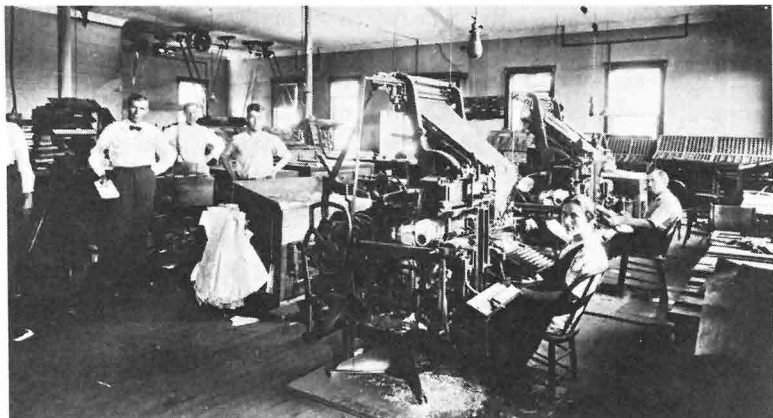


J.F. Harms (center back) with his publishing house crew: Wm. Penner, P.H. Berg, Jacob Koop, Ben Ratzlaff, Elsie Neufeld, Emma Wall and Eva Weinmeister.

old Harms. Schellenberg, however, was still listed as editor and J.F. Harms as assistant editor.

The *Zionsbote* editorial column of May 21, 1930 consisted of *Ein letztes Wort vom Editor* (A Final Word from the Editor) in which Schellenberg gave a resume of his service to the Conference and the reasons for his withdrawal from his position. They were: (1) the personal hostility, molestation and persecution from the leadership of the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church, and (2) when he had refused to pay attention to the above efforts, members of the Hillsboro church had been elected to the Publication Committee to oppose him. One of these, whom he named, had threatened him by saying, "I'll do anything to spite you." Working under these conditions, Schellenberg said, had made it impossible for him to continue, so he had turned more and more of the work over to P.H. Berg, his assistant, and had withdrawn. He maintained that committee members should be people who had a heart for publications instead of being ambitious and self-seeking for their own honor. Schellenberg did not actually resign, however, but turned the matter over to the Publication Committee and the Conference, feeling that further arrangements were their prerogative.

When the General Conference met at Hepburn, Sask.,



The crew at work in the plant of the publishing house in Hillsboro. J.F. Harms is standing toward the back of the room (with suspenders).

from May 30 through June 4, it passed a resolution accepting Schellenberg's final word as a definite resignation. It also expressed regret and concern regarding what it felt to be unbrotherly accusations in his "final word," and absolved the Publication Committee of wrongdoing.

Upon the recommendation of the Publication Committee, P.H. Berg was elected editor and manager of the publishing house for a three-year term. This lightened the load for Harms. Berg now wrote "*Aus eurer Werkstube*," and by 1932 had also taken over writing the Sunday school lesson expositions and the "*Verschiedenes*" column.

Sending Relief to Russia

After his return to Hillsboro in 1921 Harms not only began working at the publishing house but soon began to help his good friend, Jacob G. Ewert, in copying and processing seemingly endless numbers of addresses and requests for "food drafts" for the starving people of Russia.

The victory of the Russian Bolsheviks in the "October Revolution" of 1917 had ushered in a period of indescribable terror and suffering, especially for the Mennonites in the Ukraine of southern Russia. For three years civil war raged and the Red and White armies seesawed back and forth over the Mennonite

villages, sometimes for weeks, expropriating food, supplies, livestock and whatever they wanted. Some villages changed hands as many as twenty-three times. Between these sieges, hordes of outlaws, criminals and malcontents passed through the villages plundering, raping, burning and killing. November 1918 to the fall of 1920 was a period of anarchy. The most cruel and notorious of the marauders was Nestor Machno, a revolutionary who had previously been condemned to death, then exiled to Siberia, and finally freed by the Revolution. Machno held sway in the Ukraine during the winter of 1919-20 perpetrating atrocities, murders and destruction and burning entire villages. The irony of all this was that Machno knew the Mennonites well, having worked for them as a young man, and had even learned to speak the Low German of the Mennonites. He had felt he was underpaid by them and was now collecting his dues with horrible interest. The unsanitary conditions, the forced quartering of soldiers and marauders, plus a lack of medical supplies and care, resulted in a rampant spread of the dreaded spotted typhus, cholera, syphilis and malaria. Thousands died. On top of all this, a terrible famine, due to two years of drouth and crop failures, with no reserves of grain or horses with which to seed the soil, struck the Ukraine in 1921 and continued to 1923. It was reportedly the worst famine in Russian history. Millions, including many Mennonites, died of starvation. Had it not been for the extensive relief work and contributions by fellow Mennonites in North America, Holland and Germany, infinitely more would have succumbed.

To enable Americans to help relatives and friends in need of food and clothing in Europe, the American Relief Administration devised a remittance system under which an individual would advance \$10 to the ARA for which the organization agreed to deliver a definitely described variety and quantity of food and clothing to designated persons in the land of famine. A knowledge of both Russian and English was required to fill out food-draft applications for Russia. Thousands were willing to contribute to help the needy, but did not know how to fill out the applications. It was in filling out these applications that a man by the name of Jacob G. Ewert of Hillsboro rendered inestimable service for the famine-stricken people of

Russia, even though he did not serve on any of the organized relief commissions. It was through Ewert that J.F. Harms became involved in famine relief.

Ewert had come to America from Poland as an eight-year-old. Intellectually brilliant, he managed to become a country schoolteacher and an intermittent student at Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., until he became a bedfast victim of paralysis at the age of twenty-three. Ewert was a master of both English and German, a scholar of Greek, Latin and Hebrew, and had taught himself a reading and writing knowledge of seven additional modern European languages, including Russian, while confined to his bed. He was exceptionally well informed on national and international issues and served as secretary of the Socialist Party, as general secretary of the Kansas Prohibition movement (for which he wrote a number of tracts) and as a teacher of Latin, Greek and Hebrew to Tabor College students who came to his bedside. He also wrote thousands of letters regarding the nonresistant position and the relief funds he sent to Russia, he wrote a weekly column on world events for the *Hillsboro Vorwaerts*, wrote for other papers, contributed to Wenig's *Woerterbuch* (dictionary) printed in Germany, and produced other literary writings and translations.

The fact that Ewert was in the vanguard of the socialist and prohibition movements as well as in relief assistance, reveals a sensitive social consciousness on his part which was far ahead of many of his conservative Mennonite peers. Despite being unable to move from his bed, Ewert caught the spirit of the time after World War 1 when many reforms were on the horizon and both prohibition and woman suffrage were passed and written into the United States Constitution in 1920.

For almost twenty-six years Ewert continued in his bedfast condition as described by his contemporary, P.C. Hiebert, and reported by Wesley J. Prieb in *Something Meaningful for God*.

His legs were both cramped, and his joints were stiff and immovable; his left arm was shriveled. His jaw was ossified, so that all his food had to be administered in liquid form through an opening made by removing his first molar tooth. His neck was stiff. All that he could use was his right arm when suspended in a swing, and on his right hand he could use the thumb and

one finger. This man, who should have been the object of relief, became an agent of administering relief to the hungry in Russia. He learned to type. With his right arm hanging in a swing, he punched keys on a typewriter placed on his bed. His brother David, also an invalid, moved the carriage and put new sheets of paper into the typewriter: For hours at a time and during the days of the food-draft rush, from early morning till often past midnight, these two men would work together. While Jacob, the elder, would pick away on the keys to fill the line, David would sit motionless near at hand with a small string attached to the cylinder of the machine. As soon as the line was complete, the shift was made with one pull at the string. The very modest home of this invalid with his brother, and a very aged mother, became the Mecca for thousands of those who wished to send help to their relatives.

Ewert's greatest contributions were especially relevant to his fellow Mennonites: (1) He was an ardent pacifist and with his unusually wide knowledge was able to counsel hundreds of young men from far and near who beat a path to his door to ascertain their rights when they were about to be drafted into service in World War 1. (2) According to J.F. Harms the plight of the starving Mennonites in Russia after the 1917 Revolution and its aftermath stabbed through Ewert's soul like a knife and drove him to work ceaselessly to stimulate people to give aid to help these needy brethren. How many were saved from starvation through these efforts, only God knows.

By 1922 numerous bundles of letters were arriving daily from the needy and from those who wished to contribute. Despite often working far into the night, even with outside help, Ewert found himself getting farther and farther behind. He called on J.F. Harms to help him in this mission of mercy. Harms, who had remained vitally interested in the people and country from which he had come, and whose Christian faith motivated him to do everything possible to help relieve human suffering, could not refuse the call. Thus Harms and Ewert worked together in this effort for their brethren in Russia.

On March 15, 1923 the last applications for food drafts were accepted, as the program was being terminated by the ARA. After a busy day, the last money for food drafts was transmitted to the local bank. In all, Ewert had written applications for \$89,000 worth of drafts. Then, as if prophesying, he

said, "I have written the last food draft application. My work is done."

That night Ewert took ill with influenza. The next day he lost consciousness. At nine o'clock that evening, March 16, 1923, he died. His work truly was done!

After Ewert's death and the termination of the food draft program, many needy in Russia were still pleading for help and Americans were ready to contribute. J.F. Harms took over the work of accepting funds and either transmitting them directly, sending packages or working through relief organizations. Harms was especially active in famine relief to Russia in 1932-33 when the terrors of the collectivization of farms brought on another famine in which five to eight million, including 100,000 German-speaking people, reportedly died. Mennonites around the world again helped their starving brothers and sisters. Harms was one of the intermediaries in transmitting this help.

Although Harms's relief efforts were not Conference assigned, from very early on they had the approval of the Conference, which had a history of bringing relief to people in need. As editor of the *Zionsbote* Harms had always called attention to areas where relief was needed and then volunteered to send contributions to the needy areas. As far back as the 1884 conference, attention had been called to needy brethren in Russia. It was decided that this was a matter in which the Conference had a responsibility, but since there was no Conference agency to forward the funds, action was left to the individual churches. The 1895 conference decided that a special offering for relief be taken annually on Thanksgiving Day and that the editor of the *Zionsbote* (J.F. Harms) serve as treasurer for these funds. This practice continued for many years. During the great famine in Russia after the Revolution, the churches were urged by the Conference to gather as much money as possible to bring relief to the needy. These funds were to be sent to the missions treasurer. After the Mennonite Central Committee came into existence in 1920, funds and material aid were also transmitted through this agency. It was not until 1924 that the Mennonite Brethren Conference established a Relief and Welfare Committee to serve as a link with MCC and the

pioneer relief work in which Harms and others had long been engaged.

Harms continued his mission of mercy until June 4, 1937, when at the age of eighty-two he sent the treasury balance of \$72 to M.A. Kroeker at Marion, S.D., who had been elected by the 1936 general conference to continue the work. Totals of how much money or how many packages of food or clothing were sent by Harms are not available, but partial records show that between 1930 and 1934 he transmitted a total of \$53,409.50 in cash, food and clothing to the needy in Russia. How many were helped through his efforts, or how many were saved from starvation, especially during the 1932-33 famine, only the perfect records of an omniscient God will one day reveal.

At the 1936 General Conference session at Reedley, Calif., Harms was publicly recognized for his service to God, the Conference and humanity and was voted a pension of five dollars per week for the next three years. This was later changed to ten dollars per month and continued till the end of his life.

Preaching the Gospel

Ever since he joined the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1884 Harms had been preaching the gospel along with his other activities. He had served as leading minister (pastor) of the Mennonite Brethren churches at Hillsboro, Kan.; Medford, Okla.; and Flowing Well, Sask. He had also served as itinerant evangelist and church worker in Saskatchewan and North Dakota for several years. From 1921 through 1935 Harms continued to preach at various occasions and to furnish sermons for the *Zionsbote* from time to time. Most of Harms's sermons in the *Zionsbote* and those extant in manuscript are from this period.

An analysis of these sermons shows a theology which integrates evangelism, the ethical mandate of the gospel toward society, and discipline. His sermons were textual expositions showing deep thinking and reasoning and using Scripture prooftexts to substantiate his conclusions. He adhered to the principle that the Scriptures must always be explained and amplified by the Scriptures.

Though Harms's sermons were not primarily evangelistic,

they always emphasized the theological basis and primacy of the new birth. How strongly he felt about this is shown by his editorial comments in the *Zionsbote* on a revival begun under the ministry of Dr. R.A. Torrey at Tabor College in 1922. After Torrey left, the revival was continued, first under one, then under a second evangelist. Harms opined that it must be getting quite difficult for the students to concentrate on their studies, but concluded that all sacrifices must be considered unimportant in comparison to the salvation of immortal souls.

Regarding modern evangelistic methods of preaching "easy believism" and trying to scare people into the kingdom, Harms stated his opposition, claiming that these do the kingdom of God more harm than good. In fact, he maintained that with individuals who have not repented, the minister should not use scriptures emphasizing faith and believing, but should seek to bring about repentance. After the individual has repented, faith should be emphasized.

But Harms never went overboard in emphasizing evangelism or the doctrine of salvation to the exclusion of Christian service and help to the needy of society. His great work of this period was one of social action in sending food and clothing to the starving people of Russia, yet his preaching never overemphasized the social mandate of the gospel, either. To him this was all a part of true Christian living. "Continuing in Christ," Harms said in one sermon, "is not only remaining in fellowship with him, it is also serving him. It is not only having a right position toward God but also toward man. It is not only looking toward Jesus, but also having open eyes, quick feet and willing hands toward the needs of our fellowman." Harms hastened to explain that works done in our own strength, however, are dead works and that as Christ gave his life for us, so we as Christians are to serve God by sacrificing ourselves for our fellowman.

Though a reader and admirer of Walter Rauschenbusch, one of the leading figures in the Social Gospel movement of the time, Harms also did not go overboard in this direction.

Those who knew Harms recall that he seldom talked about the failures and shortcomings of his church. But he was very insistent on one point: the purity of the church. This required

personal discipline. Harms disciplined himself very strictly, and expected the same of others.

As Harms grew older his emphasis focused more and more on living the life of Christian discipleship and avoiding *Weltlust* (worldly pleasures). Having lived a long life, he had seen many changes come about, especially after World War I. This was the jazz age, the "roaring twenties," the romantic heyday of flappers and flivvers. The influence of the times did not leave Mennonite Brethren unscathed. Ball playing and other sports, bobbed hair for women, painted fingernails and lips, lodge membership, alcohol, smoking and many other aberrations from Mennonite Brethren tradition and understanding of the Scriptures began to crop up more and more. Harms, who had lived most of his life in a time when these aberrations had not been problems, saw them from the vantage point of the past and could do nothing but decry them.

Thus, when on April 29, 1935 Harms celebrated his 80th birthday with a program in the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church, he brought the main address of the evening on "*Die Lust dieser Welt — eine grosse Gefahr fuer die Gemeinde*" (The Pleasures of This World — a Great Danger for the Church). On the basis of a number of biblical references he pointed out the dangers of worldly pleasures for the Christian and how to avoid them. Repeatedly he challenged the audience with the question (repeated in both German and English): "O my dear brethren and sisters, will you not now completely surrender to our dear Lord Jesus?" He decried organized ball playing (Harms emphasized he was not speaking of children playing ball), and especially the loud, heathenish screaming at ball games. He asked Christians to flee from these.

Harms seldom used anecdotes or personal illustrations in his sermons, preferring instead analogies to scriptural events and objects. Even these he used sparingly. Occasionally he quoted a stanza or more of a well-known hymn to substantiate what he was saying. As one to whom Christianity was a serious matter, and who is reported to have seldom laughed, there is absolutely no trace of humor in Harms's sermons. Some who remember Harms say he was a good preacher, but he was never one of the outstanding or most influential preachers among Mennonite Brethren of his time.

Writings During This Period

Harms had been writing for many years, but most of his material was for the moment — articles and poetry for specific occasions or events, or to fill his papers and meet his deadlines. Like his sermons, his major extant writings have come to us after 1924. Whether this was the most productive period because of fewer other involvements or whether only the more recent writings have survived, we can only speculate.

By this time Harms's age was such that it was easier to look back than to look forward. Most of his writings, probably unconsciously and consciously, went back to his roots in Russia and dealt with the evils of the times. His basic orientation was that of another era and he found it difficult to cope with the present. He also spent much time reflecting on his own life, which he realized was nearing its end.

Harms's major writing effort was achieved at a time of his life when many retire to their rocking chairs. As part of the fifty-year celebration of the Mennonite Brethren Church in North America in 1924, the Jubilee Committee asked Harms to write *Geschichte der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde, 1860-1924* (*History of the Mennonite Brethren Church, 1860-1924*). It was printed in installments in the *Zionsbote* in 1924 and part of 1925. In 1925 these installments were collected in a 340-page book and published. Until the printing of *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* by J.A. Toews fifty years later, Harms's book was the main source of information in North America about the history of the Mennonite Brethren Conference and its constituent churches. But the book was more than merely an assignment for the jubilee celebration. In the foreword P.C. Hiebert, secretary of the Jubilee Committee, stated the hope that this book would be a real contribution "to awaken and nurture the unity and loyalty of the brotherhood." Without doubt, this was also the aim of J.F. Harms in accepting this assignment. In a sense Harms may also have seen this book as calling his readers back to their roots, which he saw many abandoning for the American way of life. This he brought out more fully in subsequent writings. In fact, this seemed to be an overarching theme of most of his writings during this period of his life.

The book began by chronicling the degenerate spiritual

conditions of the Mennonite church in Russia which led to the founding of the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1860. It further reported some of the problems of the early years and the spreading of the new church in various parts of Russia, the emigration of many members to North America, and the beginnings and progress here from 1874 to 1888. Most of the rest of the book (1888-1924) was a compilation of reports of the histories of the local congregations as submitted by the churches or their representatives. The last part of the book reported on Mennonite Brethren work in missions, publications and early efforts in education.

Harms was also versatile in writing different types of literature. He wrote poetry, sermons, essays, history, dialogs (drama), parables and stories. His stories, which went back to Russia where he had his roots, were always didactic, teaching spiritual lessons. The heroes were always model characters who either already were or became exemplary born-again Christians. Apparently immune to wrongdoing or evil, they thus lacked realism. But realism was not Harms's aim. He sought to teach spiritual lessons and to present Christian characters whom the reader could imitate.

Harms's stories promoted his moral and ethical views regarding some of the issues of his day and of the past in Russia, where his father had been a well-to-do landowner. Even then John's sympathies had been with the landless, the pietists, the downtrodden. His writings, however, showed that the rich could overcome the corrupting influences of wealth by following Christ and remaining faithful to their Lord.

One story which illustrated some of Harms's views was a continued story in the *Zionsbote* in 1926. Its title was "*Ivan und der Dorfschultze, eine belehrende Geschichte*" (Ivan and the Village Mayor, an Instructive Narrative).

The setting of the story was a village in Russia where two Mennonites were required to transport arrested persons. One believed they should be obedient in this regard, the other believed that obedience in this case was not consistent with the Mennonite nonresistant position.

One day a young Russian named Ivan came to the mayor. He needed a place to stay and was willing to do menial work for food and a place in the barn to sleep. He was allowed to

stay. Soon a prisoner was brought to the mayor for transport. Ivan recognized him as being a persecuted *Stundist* (member of a religious movement resulting from the pietistic revival of the 19th century among the German and Russian population in the Ukraine) whose wife was sick and whose children were in hiding because the government wanted to expropriate them and give them to an Orthodox family. With the help of the mayor, Ivan went to help the needy family. Upon his return the mayor made further arrangements for Ivan to collect money for the persecuted *Stundists*. When Ivan asked whether they could hide *Stundists* fleeing from persecution, the mayor replied that this would not be possible because the Russian servants would report them.

Ivan asked, "Aren't there converted people among the servants?"

"Very few in this village," the mayor replied.

"Why not?" asked Ivan.

"Because we are not converted," answered the mayor. "I wish I were, but I am not."

Thereupon the mayor invited Ivan into his office. Within half an hour the mayor came out, his face beaming with the peace of God that was now his. Immediately he began holding religious meetings. These soon outgrew the homes where they were held and had to be moved to the village schoolhouse. His activities were reported to the government, but apparently there were no recriminations. The mayor continued his religious activity until 1878, when the story ends with his emigration to America.

Another story which illustrated Harms's views was "*Der verschollene Knabe, eine belehrende Geschichte fuer Jung und Alt*" (The Missing Boy, An Instructive Story for Young and Old). This story appeared in the 1932 *Vorwärts-Kalender*, an almanac produced by the Mennonite Brethren Publishing House for subscribers of the *Hillsboro Vorwärts*.

In a foreword to the story Harms said that this was not a true story. It was written to show conditions of the rich class and the love of money in Russia, but above all to show that diligence, faithfulness and piety were blessed by God and that it was best to trust him, even in the darkest times.

The story began on the farm of a well-to-do Mennonite

landlord in Russia, who, because he spent most of his time looking after affairs at a distant estate, needed someone to look after his home place and especially the lime kiln he owned there.

Jacob, a fifteen-year-old boy whose widowed mother had died recently, was hired. He was very responsible, looked older than his age, was loved by the other workers, made a hefty profit every week, and made numerous improvements to the lime kiln while saving the money he earned.

One Sunday afternoon while going through some old papers, he found a letter from his deceased "mother" saying that he was not their son. They had found him as a four-year-old and had taken him in, knowing nothing about him or whether his parents were still living.

From time to time snatches of memory returned to Jacob . . . an older sister with him in a park when he wandered off to look at some birds. . . a long ride lying in a covered wagon. . . a little black cap and a red jacket. From this Jacob's employer deduced that Jacob must have been drugged and taken away by Gypsies and later abandoned when ill, perhaps from the drugs.

When a caravan of Gypsies camped near the lime kiln, Jacob learned from an old Gypsy woman named Surja that the deductions had been correct. He asked her if she had any children's clothes. When she brought them out, he chose a little black cap and a red jacket which struck a response in him. The old lady knew where the boy had come from, but knew nothing about him or what had happened to him.

When Jacob's employer came home for Christmas he brought a newspaper clipping in which a Russian general told Jacob's identical story and asked that his missing son come to see him. Jacob went, but after three months he received word that there was not enough evidence that Jacob was the missing son, so this would close the matter. Meanwhile Jacob married his employer's oldest daughter and established an ideal marriage. A son was born to them a year later.

After five years Jacob was notified to appear at the inheritance court regarding the general's estate. Here he inherited his father's land and 100,000 rubles from his mother's estate which he later divided with his sister, who inherited the

father's elegant city residence. When he returned home, Jacob became a born-again Christian.

Soon thereafter Jacob, his wife and their four-year-old son went to visit the sister. She broke down and confessed that she had refused to recognize him as her brother because she wanted the entire inheritance. Jacob urged her to accept Christ, but she refused.

Sometime later the sister died and Jacob purchased and moved into the parental home. Despite their wealth Jacob and his family remained true and humble Christians.

When the Revolution struck, Jacob and family lost everything and fled the country. However, they continued to be faithful Christians, taking the position that the material possessions had only been lent to them by God and that their relationship with him remained unchanged.

Retirement Problems

By 1934 Harms had largely retired from his work at the publishing house. His work at home, however, increased when Gunda suffered a leg ailment and other complications and was able to do very little housework or cooking. Harms now had to be chief housekeeper, cook, dishwasher and nurse for his incapacitated wife. Gunda's granddaughter came to help after school; however, this had to be done when J.F. was not around. He wanted to be self-sufficient and resented the implications of help from others. This created an ironic situation. For many years Harms had collected and sent money to needy peoples around the world. He had sent thousands upon thousands of dollars to relieve hunger and suffering in Russia, yet he himself had not learned to receive help from others when he needed it. Though outwardly a humble man, he had too much pride to accept the love and help of others, but he expected others to accept it from him.

Though Gunda was virtually immobile because of her ailing leg and her corpulence, J.F. was determined to have his picture taken with her. Nothing could stop him, especially when he learned that someone was taking pictures free at the Marion County Fair in Hillsboro. Together with a friend he rigged up a small platform at the front end of the friend's car. Then they carried Gunda in a chair, placing her and chair on

the platform. With Gunda literally "half scared to death," and with Harms walking beside her to steady the chair, they chugged away to the photographer. Mission accomplished!

On February 10, 1935 Gunda became ill with pneumonia and on February 15 she died at the age of seventy-one. The almost eighty-year-old J.F. Harms was a widower again and remained that way until his death nearly ten years later.

After Gunda's death. Harms bought a house which had been moved to Adams Street. Then he had a smaller, about twenty by twenty-foot house, in which he had formerly lived in the north part of town, moved to the back of the larger house and attached to it. Here in one bedroom, a small kitchen and bathroom Harms lived out the rest of his life, while the larger house in front supplied him with rental income of fifteen dollars per month. Little by little he sought to combat the poverty which had dogged him most of his life.

In a letter to his daughter Tina (Mrs. Kent Morehouse) he wrote in 1933: "I am working half time in the printing office as German proofreader, assistant editor, etc. The other half of my time is devoted to Russian relief work. Of course not getting any pay for this work, we have to live according to our means and be careful to save for taxes on the two houses of Mother's. But thanks be to God, we have plenty to eat and are satisfied."

By 1935 even the half salary was no longer forthcoming, but to live according to his means was one of the basic principles Harms followed strictly throughout his life, his favorite step-daughter-in-law recalls. "If he didn't have money to rent a two-bedroom house, he would rent a one-bedroom house, no matter how crowded this would be. His demands were so modest that he could have fit in easily with John the Baptist," she concluded.

Another principle Harms adhered to strictly was that of paying debts promptly. Even loans that were secured by notes he paid ahead of time if possible. He did not like to pay interest and did his utmost to avoid it; but being frequently strapped for money, he was occasionally forced to borrow.

8

Approaching the End

From 1935 to 1940 very little information is available about J.F. Harms. He lived in his little house, did his own housekeeping, attended church regularly as he had all his life, wrote occasional poems and lived the frugal life of a retiree with very little income.

For several years he owned a small food mill with which he ground cereal grains and sold the product as breakfast food, which he promoted as being good for one's health. For a while he also raised and promoted chickens as being a good health food.

He had other ways of promoting health. Once when he had a cold he discovered that steam relieved his congestion. Thinking he had the ideal solution so the congestion would not keep him awake at night, he put a large pan of water on the gas range, turned the burner as high as possible, and went to bed, sleeping wonderfully. Suddenly he was awakened by loud crunching sounds. The next thing he knew he was completely covered by something. Disentangling himself and turning on the light, he found that the steam from the boiling water had loosened the ceiling paper which plummeted down on him. He never tried this cold remedy again.

By 1941 his health was failing. On June 25 he underwent surgery from which he apparently recovered in a remarkably short time. Once recuperated, not only his physical health but also the muse within him seemed to have been given a new lease on life so that he spoke of the winter of 1942-43 as his "poetic winter." The first product of this time of creativity was *Zubereitung zur Entrueckung* (Preparation for the Rapture), a booklet written in poetic form and coming into print in 1942.

In his booklet, Harms, now eighty-seven years old, seemed

to try to "bring it all together." He had lived a long life during which values and practices had changed. He had literally become one of a past age, looking in on the present in which he now existed. He was unable to reconcile the two with each other or with the Scriptures. The only way he could come to peace about the problem was to entrust everything to God, who would not allow disparities in the millennium, and who would eventually create a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness would reign. By including race hatred in the disparities he mentioned, Harms again showed a progressive streak.

The booklet was divided into three parts: Past, Present and Future. "The Past" began with creation, using Ussher's dating system, and gravitated historically to the Reformation and Menno Simons. Then it moved into the Russian Mennonite story, through the Revolution, the advent of Communism, and the subsequent emigration of some 21,000 Mennonites to Canada between 1922 and 1930.

"The Present" began by emphasizing the importance of "Christ in us" and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in regard to the present (1942) involving, telegraph, telephone, airplanes, radio, sports and ball playing, recreation, women's rights, painted fingernails and lips, smoking, alcoholic beverages, lodge membership, individual communion cups and the handshake as the form of greeting instead of the kiss.

"The Future" took the premillennial view of the Rapture, the Tribulation, Armageddon, the Millennium where swords would be beaten into plowshares, where there would be no more racial hatred, where tobacco would not be used, moving pictures, the theater and beauty parlors would not be present (though barber shops would be permitted), nor would there be short skirts or undue bodily exposure. Then would follow Satan's last revolt, the resurrection of the dead, the great white throne judgment, and the new heaven and the new earth.

Harms admitted in the last part of the booklet that there is much we do not know or understand regarding the future and that it is more important to be ready than to insist on the exact succession of events, for everything will happen according to God's plan.

Under the "Present" Harms had mentioned individual

communion cups and the handshake as a form of greeting as compared to the kiss. Harms had been vehemently opposed to individual communion cups and considered them a break in fellowship when the change from common to individual cups was considered by the Hillsboro church. When the change to individual cups carried by only two votes, the pastor, J.W. Vogt, felt the vote was inconclusive, so the matter was tabled. This gave J.F. Harms a chance to analyze the question and come to the conclusion that for sanitation and health reasons, individual cups were the direction to take after all. Once convinced, he wrote a poem about individual cups versus the common cup and laboriously went from house to house persuading church members to vote for the innovation. When the matter was taken up by the church again, the individual cups carried by an overwhelming majority. Regarding the kiss as a form of greeting, Harms also saw the sanitation and health implications and said he had declared war on the kiss as compared to the handshake.

"When he was convinced of the advantage of change, he would work for it," recalled J.W. Vogt, Harms's last pastor. "I have found no older brother in the Conference who made changes as readily and confessed his errors as did Harms. He did not hold on to the old because of tradition, language or nostalgia. He was open to study and reason, and when the times demanded change, he opted for it."

But in areas where he felt biblical principles were at stake or being violated, Harms refused to change. And this is reflected in his writings.

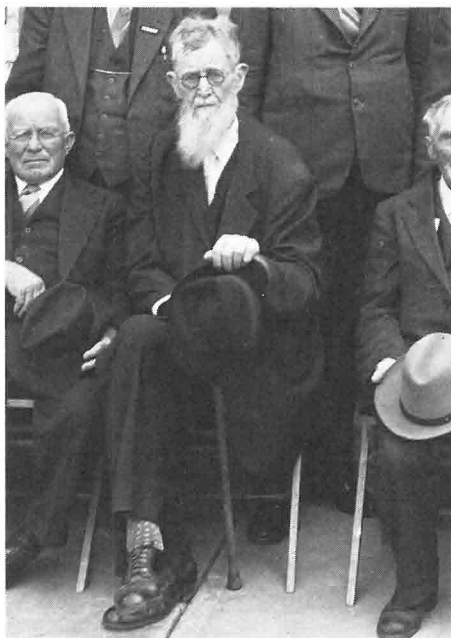
What is amazing is that at the age of eighty-seven and eighty-eight J.F. Harms wrote almost flawless poetry as far as rhyme and rhythm were concerned. He also showed a remarkable memory of biblical and historical details. At the same time he seemed conversant with current religious, social, economic and world events and spoke to these intelligently, though often with disapproval. And all this he wrote in an almost flawless German script.

Denouement

John F. Harms's life was definitely winding toward its conclusion by 1943. The once over six-foot tall, stately and

somewhat overweight Harms was now gaunt and stooped, his clothes hanging scarecrow-like on his large frame. His walk was slow and laborious, steadied by his ever-present cane, but mentally he was still sharp and incisive. His work on the *Zionsbote*, his preaching, his sending of relief contributions to starving brethren in Russia — all done for God and the Conference — were now past. Only his writings continued.

In May of 1943, however, he realized one last wish: to attend the General Conference sessions held in Buhler, Kan., about fifty miles southwest of Hillsboro. Since his first attendance of a Mennonite Brethren conference in 1884, he had attended most such gatherings and had been one of the movers and shapers for God and the Conference. Now he was going to be a silent spectator at his last conference. Instead of going by train and taking all day to get to Buhler, or by horse and carriage, also an all-day trip, Harms rode in an automobile with others. In approximately an hour they made the former all-day trip to the conference site, the Buhler Mennonite Brethren Church.



Harms at the 1943 conference in Buhler: his clothes hung “scarecrow-like on his large frame.”

En route to Buhler, at the conference and on the way home, Harms was unusually quiet. He was most likely in deep reverie. In his mind he recalled how fifty-nine years earlier, shortly after he had joined the Mennonite Brethren Church, he had attended his first conference. He had been chosen to serve as one of four recording secretaries. In subsequent years he had served as secretary or assistant secretary fifteen more times. At this first conference he had also been named to serve on a committee to produce a history of the Mennonite Brethren Church, to look after publication of the conference minutes and the reports of various Conference and church activities. Out of the work of this committee the *Zionsbote* had evolved with himself as editor and publisher for twenty years before the Conference took over and established the Mennonite Brethren Publishing House.

Harms also recalled how at this same conference it had been reported that a school association had been formed in the Mennonite Brethren church in Goessel, Kan., to help meet the growing sentiment for a joint private school to make up for the lack of religious training in the public schools. At that conference he had expressed the urgent need for such a school and had warmly urged the Conference to support the infant efforts of the school association. The conference had approved the association and wished it God's blessing and future growth. But the turn of events had been such that the association had been terminated in 1890 and all hopes for a higher Christian school had seemed to be shattered.

Then Harms remembered how in 1898 he had met President Sharp of McPherson College, a Church of the Brethren (Dunkard) college in McPherson, Kan., on the train between Hillsboro and Marion, Kan. They had begun to discuss the educational problem of the Mennonite Brethren, whereupon Sharp had heartily invited the Mennonite Brethren to take over the German department at McPherson College. At the 1898 Mennonite Brethren conference a letter from the trustees and the faculty of McPherson College had been read, offering free use of classrooms and full control of the German department to the Mennonite Brethren. Although Harms had spoken favorably of McPherson College and had recommended the move, the matter had been tabled.

In order to move forward the Kansans who had wanted to proceed in higher education had subscribed the salary for J.F. Duerksen for the year and had proceeded with the arrangement. At the 1899 conference, when the matter had come up again, the conference had voted that free-will offerings should be taken in all the churches to cover Duerksen's \$400 salary. Things looked up! But as the secretary-treasurer for the McPherson arrangement Harms had found it difficult to raise the salary for Duerksen. And it had become rougher from year to year, due to opposition to the alliance. At the 1904 conference the arrangement had been discontinued. The plans for higher education for the Mennonite Brethren Conference seemed to have been stymied.

Among those who had been students at McPherson had been young men such as H.W. Lohrenz, P.C. Hiebert, D.E. Harder and H.F. Toews. These had then moved ahead to form an association for the founding of a college. At the 1908 conference P.C. Hiebert had reported that the association had gathered funds and that an appropriate building for the new college was nearing completion. This had been the beginning of Tabor College, later to become the college of the Mennonite Brethren in Hillsboro, Kan., for which he had helped lay the groundwork in the alliance with McPherson College.

When the Board of Foreign Missions reported on the expanding mission work of the Conference, Harms's thoughts went back to the beginning of that program. He recalled how he had promoted missions through the *Zionsbote* and at conference sessions even before the Conference had an organized mission program. He recalled how in 1884 the Conference had begun to support missionaries on existing mission fields and how in 1885 a mission committee had been elected because sentiment was growing for a Mennonite Brethren missionary and a Mennonite Brethren mission field. To meet this desire, the 1889 conference had commissioned a committee, including himself, to look for a mission field. Special interest had been crystalizing in the Conference for a mission field among the American Indians. Harms's vision for mission work had, however, been greater than a consideration of only the Indians. At a meeting of the committee in 1890 he had suggested that the Conference should also consider working among the blacks in

the South, but he had been ahead of his time, and no action had been taken on his suggestion. Trying to get the Indian mission started, he and the other committee members had made a tour through New Mexico and Arizona Territory in 1891 to assess mission possibilities. In 1892 he had been elected to a committee which was to move forward that year in establishing a mission work among the Indians.

Harms recalled in his reverie how in 1894 he and the committee had visited Indian settlements in Oklahoma Territory and how they had decided to start a mission program among the Comanche Indians. They had been sitting outdoors on blankets on Comanche land considering the seriousness of the moves they were making. They had knelt in earnest prayer pleading for God's leading. Then each one present had selected a Bible verse to direct their decision. Surely, they had felt, they were in the very presence of God!

The decision made, the committee members had left for home while the appointed missionary for the new effort, Henry Kohfeld, purchased a pony and remained to seek permission from Comanche Chief Quanah Parker to establish a mission station. The seed of Mennonite Brethren missions had been planted. It had since grown into a large tree.

Harms further recalled that in 1895 he had been re-elected to the Indian Mission Committee and in 1896 he had been elected to the newly formed Foreign Mission Committee and had been designated treasurer. In 1899 he had been re-elected to this committee, and that year the first Mennonite Brethren missionaries from America, the N.N. Hieberts, had been sent to India. Then he recalled how at the 1900 conference it had been he who had made the motion to establish the first station at Sekunderabad in India, where a mission compound was available and where the Hieberts were already working. He realized he had had a vital part in the establishing of foreign missions in the Conference.

What had Harms's contributions meant to the Conference?

Ed G. Kaufman in his book, *The Development of Missionary and Philanthropic Interest Among the Mennonites of North America*, mentions Harms as one of three Mennonite Brethren leaders through whom the cause of missions was crystalized

and popularized into a group ideal. The other two were N.N. Hiebert and Peter H. Wedel.

J.W. Vogt, Harms's last pastor, summarized Harms's contributions as follows: "If it had not been for Harms's promotion of conference publications, education and missions, I do not know how they would ever have come into existence. Yet these have been the prime factors in unifying Mennonite Brethren over the years."

Concluding his reverie, Harms also thought back how he had served five terms in the Program (Agenda) Committee, two terms on the board of directors of the Endowment Fund Committee, as well as serving on the Auditing Committee. While serving as pioneer publisher of the *Zionsbote* he recalled, he had been a member of the Publication Committee as they struggled to continue the *Zionsbote* until the Conference finally established its own publishing house.

Since this was the last conference session he would attend, he must also have thought of the numerous district conferences he had attended during his lifetime, and how in 1903 he had been assigned to the Committee for Extension which had arranged for restructuring the Conference to create these districts.

Since the first official conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church in North America in 1879, the Conference had met annually and had represented all the churches which had spread from the Midwest to the West Coast and to Manitoba and Saskatchewan in Canada. As the Conference grew and expanded into more and more directions, it became increasingly difficult to maintain unity as well as to get a fair representation at conferences. The assignment of the committee had been to restructure the Conference into districts which would more closely represent the people. This had proved to be a formidable task since the churches were widely scattered. Thus it had not been until 1909 that the Conference accepted the new arrangement as part of its new constitution whereby the General Conference would meet triennially and the district conferences would meet annually to make decisions for their respective areas. The first district conferences had convened in 1910 and the next general conference had met in 1912.

By now Harms and his traveling companions had arrived

at Hillsboro. His last conference had been attended. His reveries were at an end. Now he again faced the nitty-gritty of everyday living.

Introspection. . .

Harms continued to write in 1943, but the theme of his writings had changed. Formerly he had written about the world at large and about politics, then his writings narrowed down to the Mennonite Brethren Church and its problems. The narrowing spiral had continued as Harms's writings went back to his roots.

His major writing of 1943 was a booklet entitled *Eine Lebensreise* (A Life's Journey). This autobiographical booklet told the story of Harms's life up to the time of their emigration to America in 1878. It also contained eight German poems by Harms on various subjects, plus a short writing, "A Parable," which had appeared in the *Christian Leader*, the English periodical of the Mennonite Brethren.

In *Eine Lebensreise* Harms was still going back to his roots, but this was also the beginning of another period. After *Eine Lebensreise* the denouement spiral narrowed to introspection of his own life and his family.

In addition to son Peter, who was born in Russia shortly before the Harmses left for America and who died in a swimming mishap in 1891, John F. and Margaretha Harms had five children — two sons and three daughters, each born in a different place. They were, in order of their birthdates:

Anna, born September 16, 1879 at Mountain Lake, Minn., married Sam L. Hodel.

Sam, born September 4, 1881 at Elkhart, Ind., married Agnes Nickel, later Maude Humphrey. (He was originally named "Jasch" ["Jake"] and changed his name without his parents' knowledge while in school at McPherson.)

Catherina (Tina), born February 13, 1885 in Canada, Kan., married Kent Morehouse.

Susana (Susie), born July 8, 1887 in McPherson, Kan., married Joe Mohr.

Menno (changed his name to M. Ernest when working in Edmonton), born August 5, 1890 in Hillsboro, Kan., married Nancy Anderson.

John F. Harms would generally have been considered a good father, but the relationship between him and his family was apparently not intimate. The grandmother who worked in the Harms home during the Medford years reported that instead of being involved with his family Harms was usually in his study reading or writing. When he was with the family, he was quiet and preoccupied.

In later years some members of the family manifested bitterness toward him, feeling that he had been too strict and had not shown enough empathy and love to his children. He admitted and deeply regretted this in his last years. On the other hand, he felt that he should at times have had greater understanding from his family. His relationship with his son Sam seemed to be especially strained. No doubt the fact that Sam had divorced his first wife and remarried, which Harms opposed on biblical grounds, added to the estrangement. Thus, when, according to a diary entry of December 22, 1943, Sam sent J.F. a copy of the song, "*Das Jahr neigt sich zu Ende*" (The Year Is Drawing to a Close) which he had memorized in his youth and now written down from memory, J.F. wrote, "It made me happy." It seems that Harms's granddaughter assessed the family relationship correctly when she suggested that Harms's children respected him, but that there was a lack of real affection between them. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why none of his children were present for such major occasions in Harms's life as the funeral of Margaretha, his marriage to Gunda and his eightieth birthday celebration. For his funeral only his daughter Tina (Mrs. Morehouse) came from Minnesota.

Adding to the relationship problem was the fact that Harms was, according to some who knew him, a very impatient man who expected unquestioning obedience from others. Sometimes when this was not immediately forthcoming he would go ahead on his own and get himself into trouble. He was a leader who used the tone, "This is the way it is, I'm telling you," according to a former fellow employee at the publishing house. At the same time she said that Harms was a kind man.

From time to time Harms mentioned battling violent outbursts of temper which he said he had inherited from his father. In his diary he related one incident when he was in the

depot in Moose Jaw, Sask., in 1908 returning to Edmonton from his itinerant ministry in Saskatchewan and North Dakota. A newsboy had set his basket of papers on Harms's suitcase. When Harms removed it, the newsboy attacked him with abusive language. Harms's temper exploded. Expressing his regret later, Harms wrote that he had thought he had finally conquered this weakness, and yet here it had overwhelmed him again.

J.W. Vogt, Harms's pastor during the final years of his life, said Harms almost seemed to have two personalities. At times he would be harsh, critical and unbending. At other times he would be soft, sympathetic and very supportive.

Harms saw all these shortcomings and character flaws during this period of introspection when he was eighty-eight years old.

To absolve himself of the guilt he felt, he wrote a letter of apology in poetic form which he sent to each of his children. In free translation without any attempt at poetic form, the writing said:

Hezekiah was commanded:
"Set your house in order now,
You will soon be with the dying
And your life will have an end."
Then in full obedience,
Hezekiah did as told.
There was much he didn't like
In his life that now was past,
And this brought on bitter weeping
As forgiveness he did plead.
Soon he found the comfort needed
And all honor gave to God.

This has happened to me also
Many, many years ago.
Yet today at eighty-eight
Many questions come to haunt me:
Have I fully thanked my children
For the toil that they have given
When they helped me late and early

And my worries did relieve?
 In those days of destitution,
 They took hold of work at hand.
 It helped much, much they accomplished
 And for this I thank them now —

Please, in love, accept it from me.
 Yet I need to scold myself
 And be sorry for the past:
 That I acted much too strictly
 And too loveless many times.
 O forgive the host of errors
 Many, many though they be!
 Loose yourself from this world's tumult,
 Follow Jesus Christ as Lord
 Then one day we'll meet in heaven
 Where your Mother is even now.

Greetings with 1 Peter 5:7

In heartfelt love, your aged father,

May 10, 1943

John F. Harms — 88

Harms apparently felt keenly disappointed and blamed himself for the fact that only one couple in his family (Anna and Sam C. Hodel) were following in his footsteps in being active Mennonite Brethren — in working for God and the Conference as he had. That neither of his sons had followed in his footsteps also bothered him. Hence, he told this writer (a distant relative) in his declining years, "You are really more like my son than my own sons. You have been a teacher, a minister and an editor. My own sons have been none of these." In me he apparently saw the extension of what he had hoped for and had failed to see in his sons. In the unprinted manuscript of his *Stammbuch und eigene Literatur* (Genealogical Register and Personal Literature), which was the last project of his life, he wrote as a result of his introspection (free translation from the German):

"Where are the evangelists,
 Preachers and missionaries of my family?
 None there! What poverty!
 The result is self-judgment and tears."

Harms was trying to get his house in order, knowing that death would not be long in coming. Even his period of introspection would soon be over.

The End

During the summer of 1943 J.F. Harms was hospitalized again. After his return home on August 31, he began keeping another detailed diary which he continued through January 2, 1944.

No longer did his comments deal with world events, Conference problems or even his family. These had all slipped into the background. His reading, which formerly had been voracious, was down to headlines and scanning the *Zionsbote*. His diary entries now centered on himself, his physical condition — how he rested at night, what he ate for each meal, who visited him, what he read and meditated upon during his devotions, and other minute details of his day's activities. For exercise he laboriously walked the half block to and from his mailbox with the help of a cane. He no longer was able to attend church services.

He would go to bed at eight o'clock each evening, hopefully



Harms on one of his regular walks during the final years of his life.

to sleep till about twelve or one o'clock. Then he would get up and start fixing an oatmeal porridge to which he often added onions. These, he said, were good for his health. While the oatmeal was boiling, he would have his "*Weihestunde*" (devotional hour). When the oatmeal was done, he would go back to bed till morning. In the morning, when his daily quart of milk arrived, he would eat half the oatmeal with half the milk. The other half of the oatmeal and milk he would eat for supper. At noon he would eat whatever he had on hand. He was very fond of watermelon, dark bread (the darker the better), and thought almost everything edible was improved by adding an egg. Formerly he had been bothered with obesity, but this was no longer a problem.

During the day Harms would rest as needed, and as much as his limited strength allowed, he would work on his "*Stammbuch*." Most of his information about the world around him came from the "brethren" and other friends of whom one or more visited him almost daily. These often brought eggs, potatoes or other garden vegetables as well as soup or baked goods. Occasionally one of his visitors would leave a few dollars for his livelihood. Occasionally some of his children would send him five or ten dollars to help along.

Harms's strength was visibly ebbing away, and it was only with the help of the Prieb family that he was able to continue to live alone. His health and strength continued to deteriorate until his condition forced him to enter Salem Hospital in Hillsboro on July 23, 1944.

At the hospital Harms received excellent care for which he was grateful, but his physical condition continued to deteriorate. Mentally and spiritually he nevertheless remained strong and alert. All his life, through all kinds of situations, he had lived in close communion with God. He continued this fellowship to the end. He had come to peace about the things that had formerly bothered him. He had committed society, the church and the future to God. He had apologized to his children. He was at peace with God and man. In this final period of his life, his prayers, too, had changed. Now he fervently implored the Lord to take him home. His life, his work, his service for God and the Conference were done.

At one o'clock on Sunday morning, January 7, 1945, his

prayers were answered. Death ended his life a few months short of ninety years.

Memorial services for John F. Harms were held in Hillsboro on Thursday, January 11. A preliminary service was held in the funeral home with C.N. Hiebert in charge. At the main service in the Mennonite Brethren church, two of Harms's closest friends spoke: H.W. Lohrenz on "I have fought a good fight, I have kept faith. . . ." (2 Tim. 4:7-8) and P.C. Hiebert on "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord. . . and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13). Lohrenz's sermon was his last before his own death about two months later. Music at the service consisted of the song, "*Auf ewig bei dem Herrn*" (Forever with the Lord) by a group of older brethren of the church, some of whom had visited Harms regularly during his later years, a solo by Herbert C. Richert, and a song, "*Gottes Volk darf nie ermueden*" (People of God Need Ne'er Grow Weary) by the men's chorus of the church. The pastor, J.W. Vogt, led the service and read the obituary, most of which Harms had written in anticipation of his death.

Burial was made in the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Cemetery in a grave beside that of his second wife, Margaretha. Soon thereafter the small marble marker, matching Margaretha's, was erected, saying:

JOHN F. HARMS
1855-1945

Thus not only the life of pioneer publisher John F. Harms but also a major chapter in the history of the Mennonite Brethren Conference in America had come to a close. He had labored hard and long and the day of his reward had arrived, as said appropriately by Charles Wesley:

"Servant of God, well done!
Thy glorious warfare's past;
The battle's fought, the race is won,
And thou art crowned at last."

Notes

It is fortunate that John F. Harms left a number of writings about his life ("*Eine Lebensreise*," "*Stammbuch und eigene Literatur*"), diaries of two periods of his life, various bits and pieces of information about himself, often on note cards, as well as some of his other original papers, sermons and writings. These are housed in the Tabor College Archives in Hillsboro, Kan. Here also are the files and microfilms of the *Zionsbote* from 1890, files of the *Hillsboro Vorwaerts*, and yearbooks of the general and district conferences of the Mennonite Brethren Church. These have been the primary sources for this writing.

Personal interviews with several people who had had personal contact with Harms and knew him well, were made before the death of these individuals. Those who have died since the interviews are Mrs. Margaret Jantzen Wiens Pauls and J.W. Vogt. Abe Heinrichs died a number of years ago.

Introduction

The first part of this introduction drew on J.H. Lohrenz's *The Mennonite Brethren Church* (MB Publishing House, 1950), G.W. Peters's *The Growth of Foreign Missions in the MB Church* (the Board of Foreign Missions, 1952), J.F. Harms's *Geschichte der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde* (MB Publishing House, 1925), *We Recommend . . .* Part I by A.E. Janzen (The Board of Christian Literature, 1978) and the General Conference Yearbooks for the respective dates. The last part of this introduction drew on the chapters which follow in this book (*Pioneer Publisher*) and their sources.

Chapter 1

This chapter drew heavily on Harms's *Eine Lebensreise* which tells the story of his family background and life up to the time of his emigration to America. Background information on the Crimean War, freeing of the serfs and the accompanying reform was obtained by consulting Joan Thomson's *Russia, the Old and the New* (John Murray, 1948); Otto Hoetsch's *The Evolution of Russia* (Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966); and John Lawrence's *A History of Russia* (Mentor Books, 1962). *Mennonite Encyclopedia* (Herald Press, Vol. I, 1976; II and III, 1957; IV, 1959) furnished information regarding the Mennonites in Prussia and Russia: s.v. "Russia," "Chortitza," "Molotschna," "Ukraine," "Villages." P.M. Friesen in *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia* (1789- 1910) writes of the unqualified teachers in the early years. Interviews with Cornelius Wall provided information on the arrangement and appearance of the typical Mennonite

farm in Russia. Quiring and Bartel's *In the Fulness of Time* provided pictures of the Schmidt estate. Information about Harms's first baptism and church membership was found in his unpublished "*Stammbuch und eigene Literatur*."

Chapter 2

This chapter continued to draw heavily on *Eine Lebensreise*. Information on the school and teacher residence combination was gleaned from another interview with Cornelius Wall, who was a teacher in Russia prior to his coming to America in 1924. Information regarding the changes coming to Russia during the latter half of the 19th century was found in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*: s.v. "Russia" and John A. Toews's *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1975). Migration statistics were gleaned from *Mennonite Encyclopedia*: s.v. "Migrations of Mennonites." Harms's "*Landhunger*" was printed serially in the *Zionsbote* in 1926.

Chapter 3

Clarence Hiebert's compilation of information about the emigration of the Mennonites from Russia, *Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need* (Faith and Life Press, 1974), provided the shiplist which shows the Harmses coming to America on the S.S. *Strassburg* and contained the reproduction of a news story detailing the arrival of the immigrants, taken from the *Herald of Truth* of July 1878. The story was written by John F. Funk, editor, who was in New York and witnessed the arrival. C.J. Dyck's *An Introduction to Mennonite History* (Herald Press, 1967) provided immigrant statistics and *Mennonite Encyclopedia* provided information about "Mountain Lake." The Harmses' settling at Mountain Lake and J.F. Harms's editorial stint in connection with Elkhart as well as his moving to Kansas and his new spiritual orientation, were detailed in his unpublished "*Stammbuch und eigene Literatur*." For descriptive materials of Canada, Lehigh and Hillsboro, Kan., we are indebted to Sondra Van Meter's *Marion County Past and Present* (Marion County Historical Society, 1972). Information on the French Creek Revival came from the "Festival Program" of the centennial celebration of the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church, April 19-26, 1981. The evaluation of John Harms's preaching was supplied by a personal interview with A.E. Janzen. Information about early educational efforts of the Mennonite Brethren are detailed by Harms in an unpublished manuscript, "*Vorarbeit in der MB Gemeinde zur Erlangung einer eignen Schule*" and respective Conference yearbooks. Details of Harms's life are frequently supplied by individual cards and papers in the Harms files in the Tabor College Archives. Information about the inception of the *Zionsbote* appears on such cards, the respective Conference yearbooks and Harms's

Geschichte der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde. For Harms's public newspaper and political activities we are indebted to James C. Juhnke's *A People of Two Kingdoms* (Faith and Life Press, 1975). The personal tragedy of his son Peter was detailed in a report in the *Zionsbote* of July 15, 1891 and Harms's "*Stammbuch und eigene Literatur*." Harms's activities in the Hillsboro church were reflected in the minutes of the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church congregational meetings and in reports in the *Zionsbote*.

Chapter 4

Most of the information in this chapter is derived from the microfilm files of the *Zionsbote* which regularly printed the minutes of the Publication Committee meetings as well as reports. The respective Conference yearbooks and Harms's *Geschichte der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde* also yielded information. These were augmented by an interview with the "old grandmother" (Mrs. Margaret Jantzen Wiens Pauls) and an incidental conversation some thirty years ago with Abe Heinrichs. Details about the church at Medford, Okla., came from Harms's *Geschichte der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde*.

Chapter 5

This chapter drew heavily on the diaries Harms kept from Nov. 17, 1907 — Aug. 31, 1908 and from Oct. 8, 1908 — July 19, 1909. These were supplemented by reports Harms wrote to the *Zionsbote* and by his *Geschichte der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde*. Information about "History of Canada" came from *World Book Encyclopedia*, 1976. Information about "Doukhobors" (also Dukhobors) came from *Colliers Encyclopedia*, 1973; *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1981; *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, 1957; *World Book Encyclopedia*, 1976.

Chapter 6

The first part of this chapter continued to draw heavily from Harms's diary and bits of information found in his files. Information for the part of the chapter dealing with the Herbert Bible School was gleaned from the respective yearbooks of the Northern District Conference, from *Konferenz Jugendblatt* of November-December 1955, and especially from Margaret Epp's *Proclaim Jubilee, a History of Bethany Bible Institute*. The illustration in this connection by Lorlie Barkman was taken from *Proclaim Jubilee* with permission. The reason for the Harms's move to Seattle was given in the obituary of Mrs. Harms published in the *Zionsbote* of May 25, 1921. M.B. Fast's *Geschichtlicher Bericht* detailed Harms's work with the relief clothing in Seattle. Information about Mrs. Harms's further illness and their leaving Canada for California was found in Harms's "*Stammbuch und eigene Literatur*."

Chapter 7

Further information on the situation of Mrs. Harms's health, their trip to Hillsboro and her death and burial were found in reports and in her obituary in the *Zionsbote*. Information about Harms's marriage to Adelgunda Jost Prieb and subsequent events were taken from interviews with Katherina (Mrs. John) Prieb, Harms's favorite step-daughter-in-law, and Wesley J. Prieb. Information about the publishing house, the *Zionsbote* and the *Hillsboro Vorwaerts* was found in the files of these periodicals and the respective General Conference yearbooks. Background information for the situation necessitating relief assistance to Russia was drawn from C.J. Dyck's *An Introduction to Mennonite History* (Herald Press, 1967), J.H. Lohrenz's *The Mennonite Brethren Church* (MB Publishing House, 1950); J.A. Toews's *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (MB Publishing House, 1975), and John B. Toews's *Lost Fatherland* (Herald Press, 1967). P.C. Hiebert and Orie O. Miller's *Feeding the Hungry* (Mennonite Central Committee, 1929), *Mennonite Encyclopedia* s.v. "Ewert, Jacob G.," and J.F. Harms's article on Ewert's life and activity written upon Ewert's death in the *Hillsboro Vorwaerts* of March 23, 1923 as well as *Something Meaningful for God* (Herald Press, 1981) provided information about relief work and Ewert's involvement in particular. Ledgers in the Tabor College Archives showed partial records of Harms's relief transmissions. The General Conference yearbook of 1936 spoke of Harms's recognition for this work. The analysis of Harms's sermons, his emphases and style of preaching is based on sermon manuscripts found in the Tabor College Archives or sermons printed in the *Zionsbote* or *Hillsboro Vorwaerts* and personal interviews with A.E. Janzen and J.W. Vogt. Manuscripts or clippings of Harms's stories were found in the Tabor College Archives. Information regarding Harms's "Retirement Problems" was gleaned from interviews with Katherina Prieb, Harms's correspondence and the death report and obituary of Gunda in the *Zionsbote*.

Chapter 8

Information for the first part of this chapter was gleaned from interviews with Katherina Prieb, Eva Weinmeister and J.W. Vogt as well as the *Zionsbote*. The list of Harms's family appears in his "*Stammbuch und eigene Literatur*." Harms called the winter of 1942-43 his "poetic winter" in *Eine Lebensreise* and also in his "*Stammbuch*."

Harms's reverie in the second part of this chapter is based on General Conference yearbooks, reports in the *Zionsbote* and Harms's "*Vorarbeit in der MB Gemeinde zur Erlangung einer eignen Schule*." A personal interview with J.W. Vogt netted his summary of Harms's contributions to the Conference.

The last part of this chapter was based largely on Harms's diary which he kept from Aug. 31, 1943 through Jan. 2, 1944, a personal interview with J.W. Vogt, and reports of his last hospitalization, death, funeral and burial in the *Zionsbote*. His obituary appeared in the *Zionsbote* of Jan. 17, 1945.

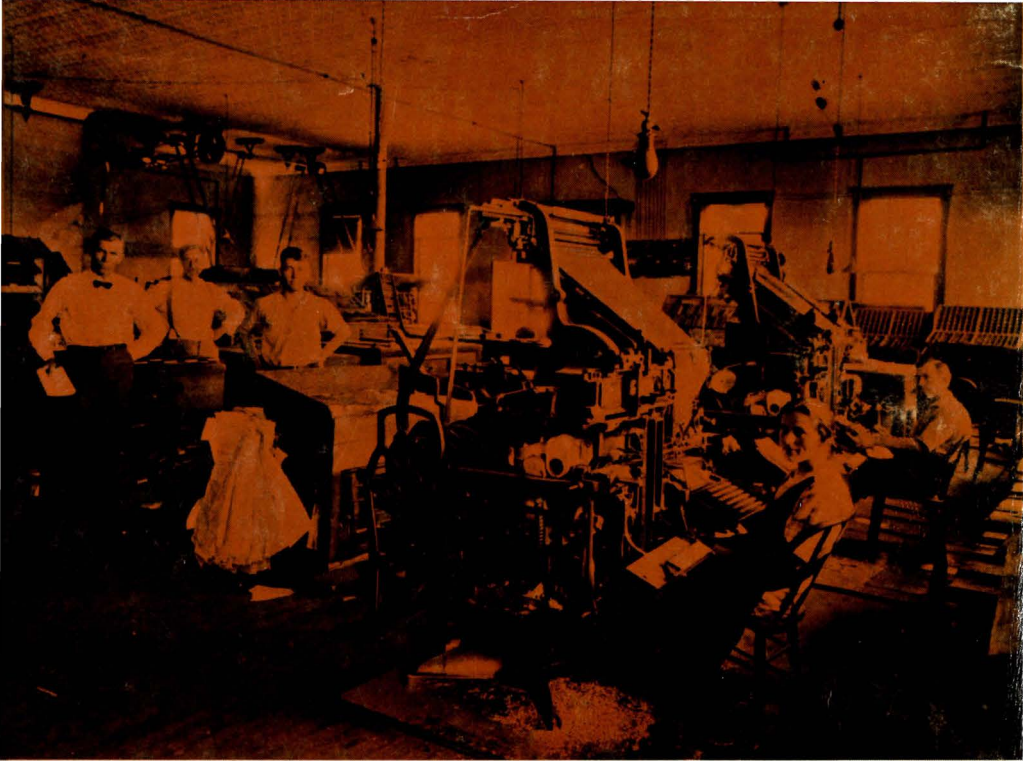
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**PIONEER
PUBLISHER:
THE LIFE
AND TIMES
OF J.F. HARMS**

The life of J.F. Harms is in many ways a prism through which one can see the many-hued development of the Mennonite Brethren Church in North America. This tireless servant was in the vanguard of movements such as missions, education, evangelism, relief work and church ministry. But Harms perhaps is remembered best for his work in Mennonite Brethren publications. He was a member of the committee which launched the *Zionsbote* and served as its first editor and publisher for more than twenty years. He also was the moving force which brought about the establishment of a Conference publishing house. This well-documented biography will keep alive the courageous and creative Christian witness of this Mennonite Brethren pioneer.

THE AUTHOR: Orlando Harms is himself a stalwart in Mennonite Brethren publishing, having served with the MB Publishing House for thirty-one years (almost twenty-five years as house manager and editor of the *Christian Leader*). In addition, he has served the Mennonite Brethren Church as pastor, college instructor, conference leader, and advocate of missions, evangelism, relief work and peace education. Currently, he lives in retirement with his wife, Erna, in Hillsboro, Kansas, where he has undertaken various writing projects.

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